

SHAYNA COOK AND LAURA BORNFREUND

STARTING YOUNG

MASSACHUSETTS BIRTH—3RD GRADE POLICIES THAT
SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

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About the Authors



Shayna Cook is a program associate for Early & Elementary Education Policy at New America where she researches and reports on a wide array of policy issues, concerning birth through third grade. She recently graduated from American University with a master's degree in education, focusing on policy and leadership. She holds a bachelor's degree in classics from Howard University.



Laura Bornfreund is director of Early & Elementary Education Policy at New America. Before joining New America, Ms. Bornfreund consulted for a number of education policy organizations including the Forum for Education & Democracy, Institute for Educational Leadership, and Common Core. She began her career as a 4th grade teacher. Ms. Bornfreund holds a master's degree in public administration from the University of Central Florida.

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Reforming Early Education, Birth Through Third Grade

State and Local Reports

From 2015 through 2016, the Early Education Initiative will be producing a series of reports from states and localities across the United States to provide an inside look at efforts to support children's learning from infancy and extending into the early grades. Access to the reports is available through Atlas (atlas.newamerica.org), the data and analysis tool designed for New America's Education Policy Program. Reports are forthcoming, or have already been published, in the following geographic areas.

A report that provides analysis and ranks all 50 states and Washington, DC on progress in advancing early education policies will be published in November 2015.



The David Douglas School District in Portland, OR

Focused on supporting dual language learners' linguistic and academic development.



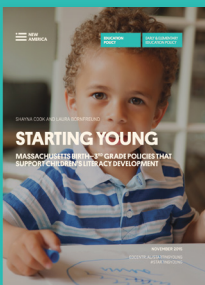
The San Francisco Unified School District

Focused on aligning teaching and learning across grade levels.



California

Focused on improving the workforce.



Massachusetts

Focused on helping children achieve success in literacy.



Minnesota

Focused on helping children achieve success in literacy.



Washington, DC

Focused on supporting dual language learners' linguistic and academic development.



San Antonio, TX

Focused on supporting dual language learners' linguistic and academic development.

INTRODUCTION

One Tuesday evening in May at the Sullivan Apartments (part of the Springfield Housing Authority), six-year-old Natali Morales sits in a chair with her feet dangling. A huge cartoon pony covers her light pink t-shirt, and she smiles as she listens to a story called *The Watermelon Seed* by Greg Pizzoli. The picture book tells about a melon-loving crocodile whose imagination goes wild after he swallows a seed. Whenever Courtney Waring, the Director of Education at The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, pauses to ask a question of her captive audience, Natali's hand shoots up and her pigtailed begin to swing as she eagerly awaits her turn to share her answer. When the crocodile accidentally swallows a watermelon seed, Waring asks all of the children to make predictions. Holding the book up for everyone to see, she asks, "what do you think will happen next?" Each child gets a turn to make a prediction about how the seed will transform in the crocodile's belly.

When the story ends, the children and their parents clap. Waring and some parents pass out watermelon wedges for the children. All of them hunt for and find the seeds. Then, Waring encourages the children to brainstorm a list of other fruits that have seeds. She writes down the ideas on the whiteboard: "lemon," "lime," "grapes." Once the brainstorming is over, Waring transitions to the art activity, modelling what to do next. Natali volunteers to help. The six-year-old lays down on a large piece of butcher paper. Waring begins tracing her body with a thick marker, making sure to trace around Natali's long, brown pigtailed.

After the tracing is complete, Natali gets to fill in what her belly, and the rest of her body, would look like if she swallowed a seed. All of the parents and other children soon join in. Each child lays on his or her own huge piece of butcher paper. Waring circulates around the room, helping to trace all of the children. Some choose to draw themselves swallowing lemon seeds; others draw orange seeds. Their pictures are detailed and often labeled with words. One child has written, "I swallowed a seed." She also labeled the dot in her belly: "lemon seed." Another child has started to color his whole body green because he swallowed a lime seed. The children color furiously, each of them excited about his or her creation. On a table, there is a stack of books. When the children are finished, each will get a copy of *The Watermelon Seed* to take home.

Programs such as the Eric Carle Museum's family literacy program can expose children and families to the joy of reading and help to build early literacy skills. This is especially important for families like Natali's, who live in the Springfield Housing Authority's properties; most live in poverty. The children in this community have a high likelihood of exposure to family stress, which makes it difficult to develop skills for success without early intervention. The Carle Museum's program partners with Dorman and Boland Elementary Schools, the two public schools that serve most of the children in the Sullivan Apartments, where Natali and her family lives.



Picture taken by Courtney Waring, Director of Education, Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art.

The Carle Museum’s literacy program was implemented under the Talk/Read/Succeed! (TRS) umbrella program. Modeled after New York City’s Harlem Children’s Zone, TRS works to improve literacy rates among young children living in the Springfield Housing Authority, providing them with opportunities to break the cycle of poverty through early education. TRS is comprised of four pillars: family engagement, parent education, child education, and family self-sufficiency. Funded by the W. K. Kellogg and Irene E. & George A. Davis foundations, TRS benefits especially from the fact that the Davis Foundation is a major funder of early literacy programs in Springfield and a strong partner of the public school district. This partnership has strengthened and deepened with funding from Massachusetts’ Department of Early Education and Care to focus on birth-through-third grade (B–3rd) alignment.

The TRS program is a good illustration of the fact that the most successful educational interventions involve families and begin early, helping to increase the opportunity for a positive life trajectory for every child.¹ High-quality early childhood education that builds literacy skills is essential to give children a solid foundation for success. Easy access to early education and early literacy interventions is what families want to help their children succeed. Waring comes to the families. Parent Antonella Santiago said, “I always come to these things. You get to spend good time with your kids, and you’re doing a lot more than just reading a book. The

activities are fun. And then, you get to bring the book home and keep reading it.”²

Programs like TRS do not typically make their way directly into state literacy policies, but can certainly be supported and expanded through state literacy and early childhood education investments, such as the state’s B–3rd grade alignment grants discussed later in this report.

In the pages that follow, we explore how these alignment grants and other Massachusetts early education policies have helped or hindered the building of local infrastructure to support the development of children’s early literacy and language skills. We conducted site visits and interviews in three Massachusetts communities—Boston, Pittsfield, and Springfield—to get perspectives from across the state. We spoke with foundations, school district officials, community programs, principals, and teachers in order to learn more about the relationship between state policy and local literacy and B–3rd efforts. (See our list of interviews on page 32.)

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has a strong vision for children birth-through-third-grade and has implemented some innovative approaches and programs. But a decrease in funding for early education and care initiatives as well as a lack of coordination and resistance to creating statewide mandated policies such as full-day kindergarten and greater access to pre-K have prevented it from making progress for all students.

Table 1
About the Communities

	Birth to Grade Three Alignment Grant	Preschool Expansion Grant	Other Initiatives
Pittsfield	✓		Pittsfield Promise
Springfield	✓	✓	Read by 4 th Grade
Boston	✓	✓	Countdown to Kindergarten

Figure 1

Pittsfield vs. Massachusetts Demographics

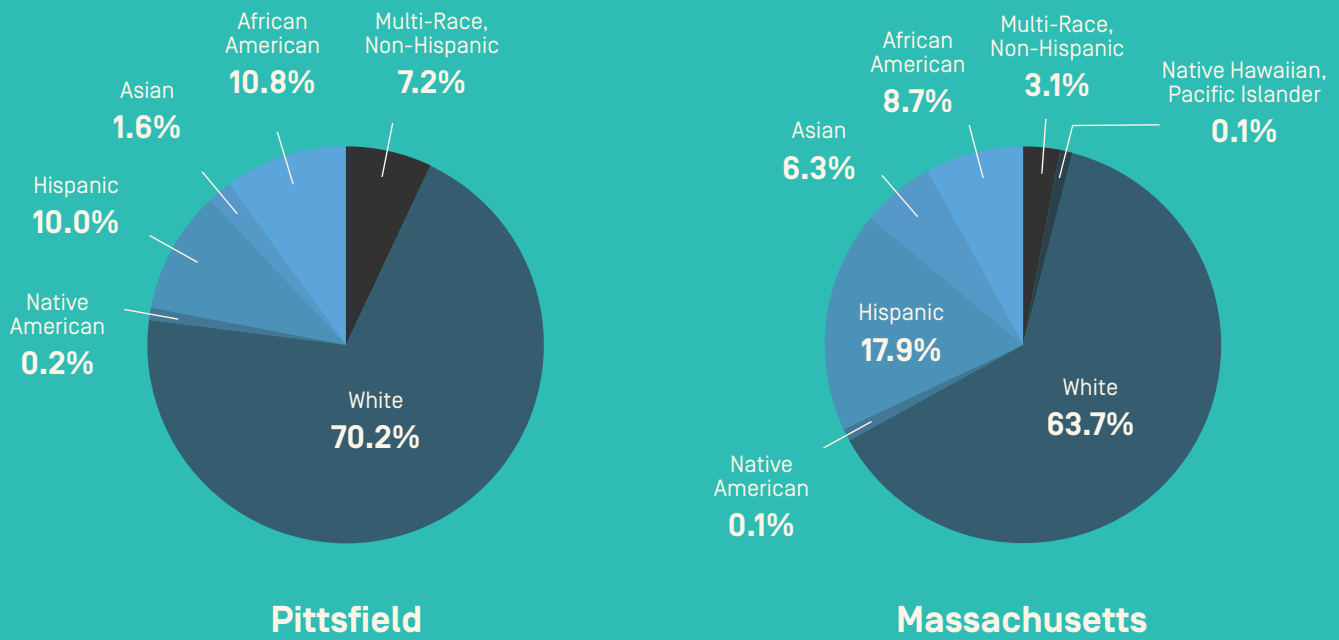
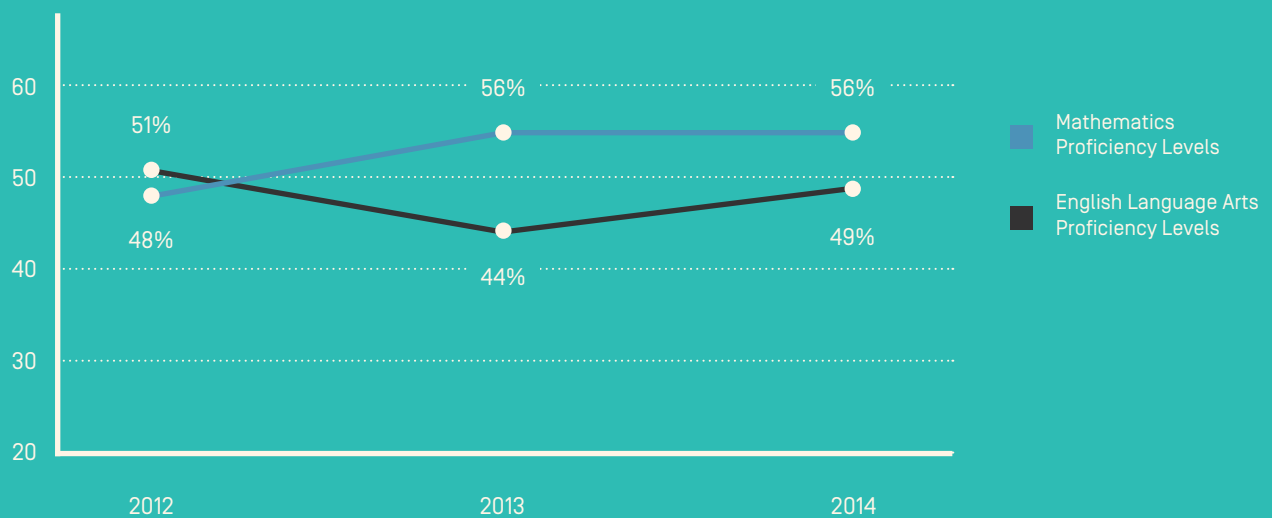


Figure 2

Pittsfield 3rd Grade Proficiency Levels



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "School/District Profiles: Pittsfield," <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/general.aspx?topNavId=1&orgcode=02360000&orgtypecode=5&>. Adapted by New America.

Figure 3

Springfield vs. Massachusetts Demographics

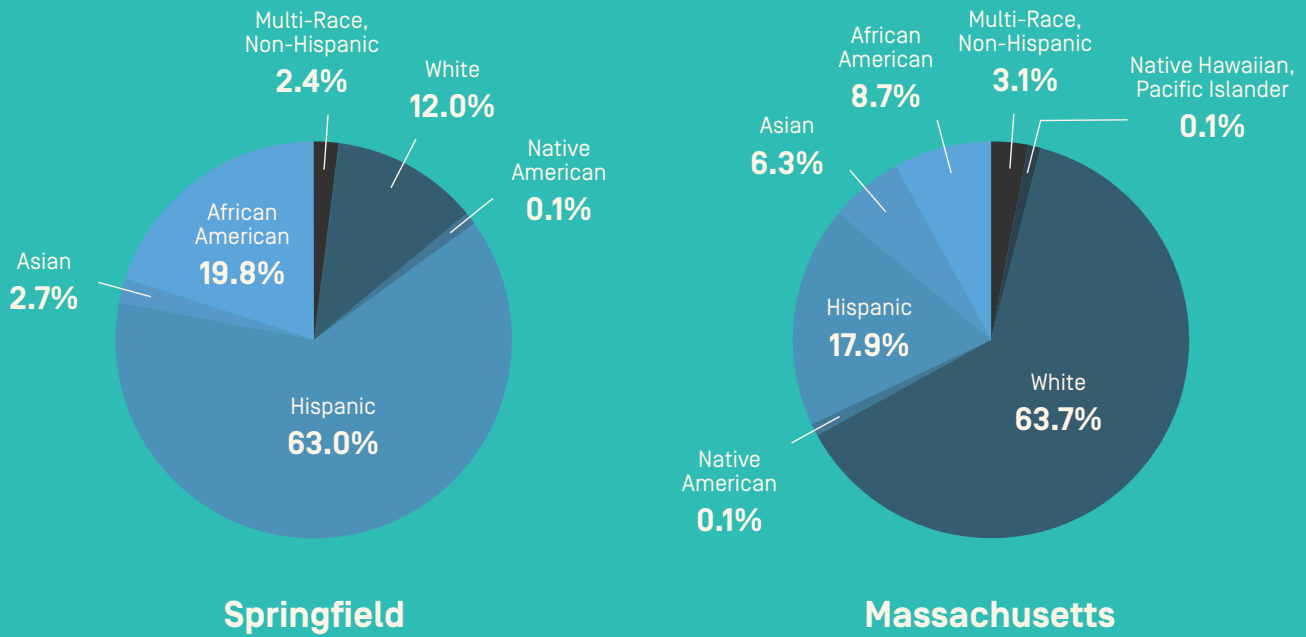
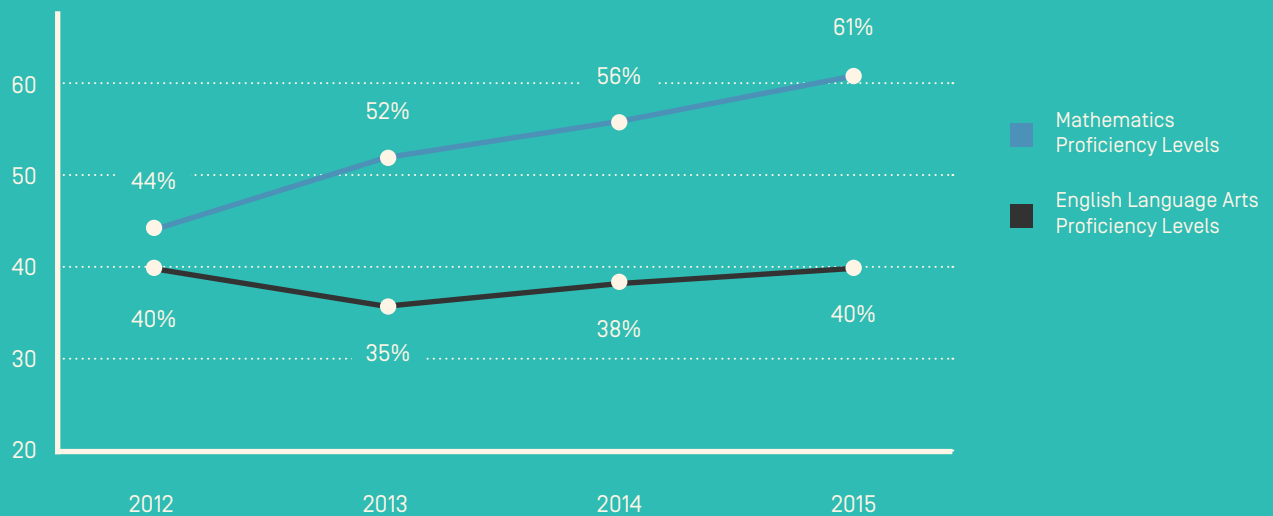


Figure 4

Springfield 3rd Grade Proficiency Levels



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "School/District Profiles: Springfield," <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/general.aspx?topNavId=1&orgcode=02810000&orgtypecode=5&>. Adapted by New America.

Figure 5

Boston vs. Massachusetts Demographics

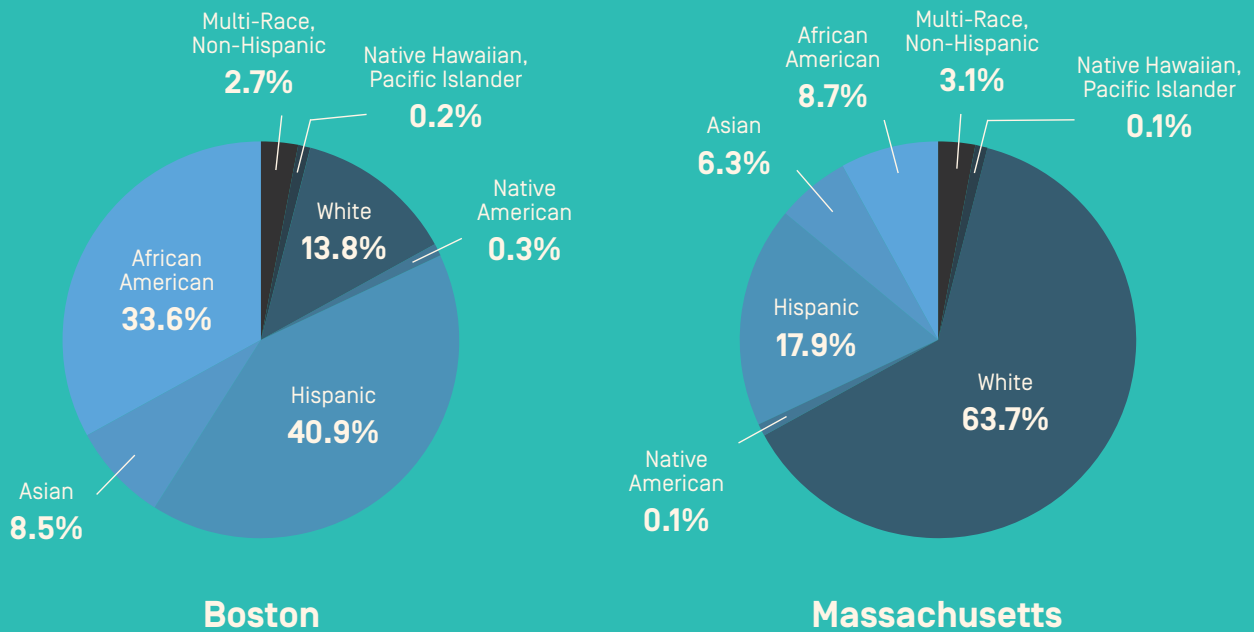
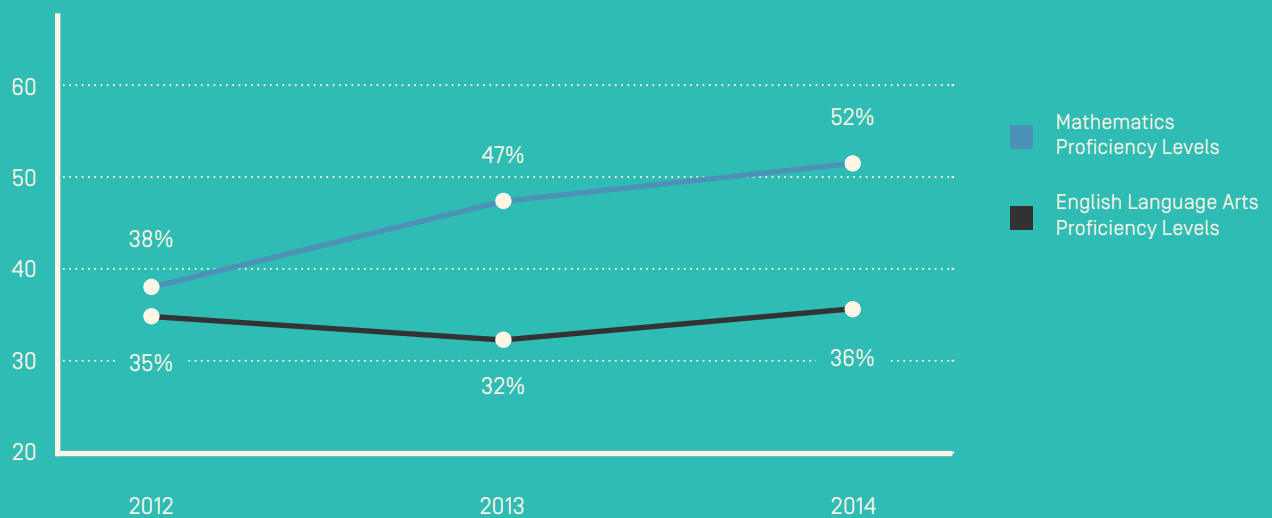


Figure 6

Boston 3rd Grade Proficiency Levels



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "School/District Profiles: Boston," <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/general.aspx?topNavId=1&orgcode=00350000&orgtypecode=5&>. Adapted by New America.

Focus on Birth-Through-Third Alignment

A high-quality, cohesive B–3rd continuum of learning can provide children (and their families) with the services and supports needed to read on grade level by the end of third grade. This is especially true for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who may need greater access to literacy supports. Intentional alignment in children’s early years can narrow opportunity and achievement gaps, while at the same time raising the achievement and developmental progression of all students. Numerous state-level policies can be instrumental in supporting this goal. These policies should ensure:

- Developmental screenings and coordinated formative assessments
- Access to high-quality early learning opportunities through a mixed-delivery system
- Access to free, full-day pre-K and kindergarten
- Highly effective educators and leaders who have knowledge of child development and evidence-based reading strategies
- Recognition of the unique needs of the growing dual language learner population
- Laws and initiatives that emphasize literacy and language development and provide appropriate supports to districts, schools, and students
- Data sharing across programs and agencies as appropriate
- Opportunities for parent engagement

While each of these individual areas can support children in reading on grade level by the end of third grade, none is a silver bullet. It is the coordination of policies and programs that leads to meaningful progress. Aligning families, early learning programs, and elementary schools is essential to fostering long-term gains and opportunities for children.



BACKGROUND ON MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts is known for its premier education system. The state has a long history of being on the forefront of innovations in education. It was the first state in the Union to pass a law making public education free and available to all children. It was also the first to develop a department responsible for statewide early learning, birth to kindergarten entry. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts consistently outperforms most states on national reading and math tests. The state had the highest fourth-grade reading scores in the nation in 2013, statistically comparable with only five other states, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).³ In the commonwealth, 47 percent of fourth graders performed at or above the NAEP *proficient* level. In comparison, 35 percent of students performed at or above the NAEP *proficient* level nationally.⁴ Again in 2015, Massachusetts had the highest fourth-grade reading NAEP scores in the nation.⁵ The state also performs well on international assessments like the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). In 2012, Massachusetts competed on the PISA as its own “nation” and was ranked fourth in reading.⁶ On the surface, this is really good news.

A deeper dive into the NAEP data shows that Massachusetts’ education system, like other state systems, is not without its challenges. The NAEP reading test results for 2013 also showed that children who were eligible for free- and reduced-price meals, a proxy for students from low-income families, scored on average 31 points lower than their peers from higher-income families. These outcomes are not unique to Massachusetts. Nationally, 80 percent of children from low-income households are not proficient readers by the time they enter fourth grade.⁷ In Massachusetts, African American and Hispanic students scored on average about 30 points lower than their white peers. These scores highlight stark disparities. Throughout the state, African American, Hispanic, low-income, and English language learners are the children with the lowest levels of reading proficiency.⁸ Not reading on grade level by the end of third grade is a strong risk factor for negative life outcomes, such as dropping out of school.⁹

Local and state policymakers, with the help of philanthropic and advocacy groups, have sought to improve educational outcomes for all children by implementing programs and supports in early

education. In 2005, with the help of Strategies For Children (SFC), a nonprofit advocacy group that has led the charge for greater investment in early childhood education throughout the state, Massachusetts created the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) to regulate policies for children (birth to school age) in early education and care and before- and after- school programs. In 2008, the commonwealth developed a coordinated system of early education and care in Massachusetts, greatly enhancing EEC’s authority.¹⁰ It created a state advisory council, and it delineated powers and duties of the EEC Board, Department, and Commissioner.

Effective State Advocacy and Community Support in Birth–3rd

Strategies for Children (SFC) has been a key player in orchestrating Massachusetts’ early childhood education through its Early Education for All Campaign and early literacy initiatives. By supporting cross-sector coalition building and community-wide strategic planning, SFC has helped build state and local momentum for birth through age-eight efforts. For instance, nonprofits have partnered with school districts to address local needs in a coordinated way with the goal of advancing literacy development. These public-private partnerships also help to promote grade-level reading by connecting children and families to effective programs, supports, and resources. In partnership with Lesaux, SFC works with coalitions of funders, early educators, superintendents, and program directors to evaluate their programs’ impact on literacy development, ensuring that program investment and implementation will lead to the intended impact, improving children’s reading.

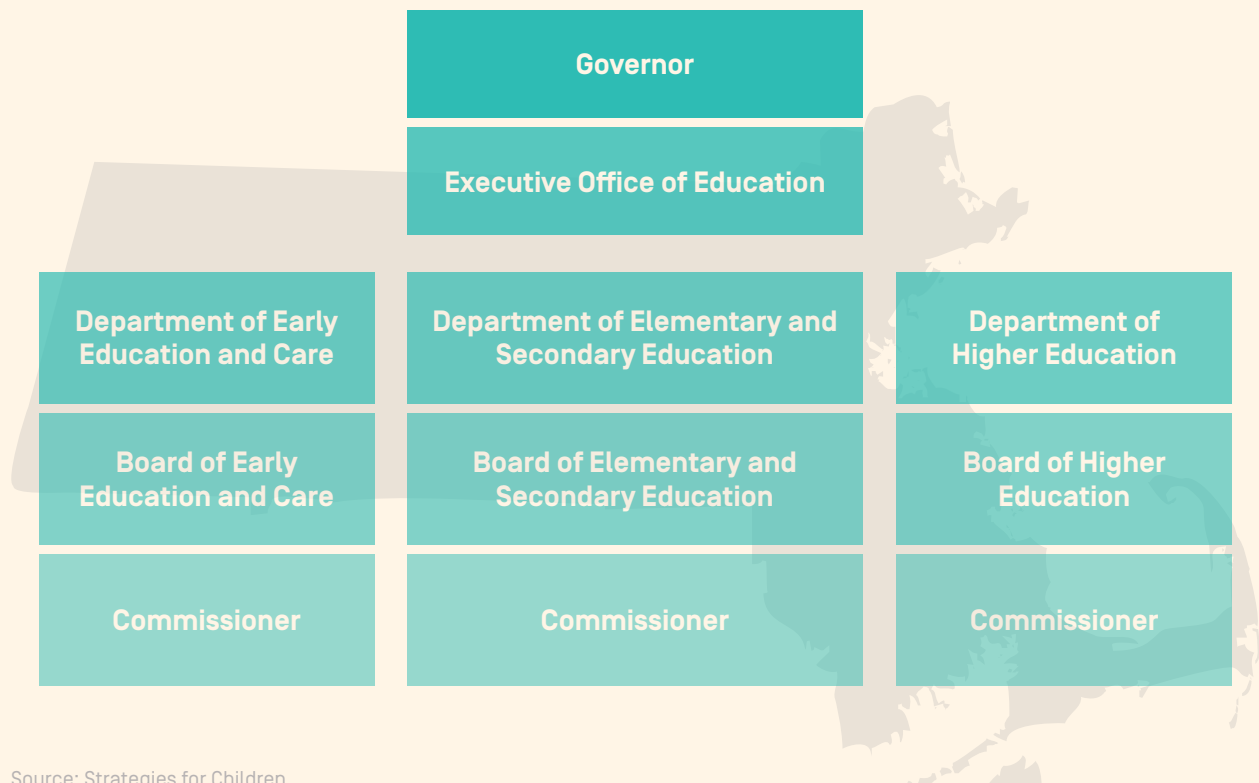
Massachusetts has attempted to establish an education governance structure for a more aligned birth-through-post-secondary system. Jim Peyser, the Secretary of Education, a member of Governor Baker’s Cabinet, leads the Executive Office of Education, which oversees the EEC, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), and the Department of Higher Education (DHE). The goal is for these three departments to work together to create a continuum of learning from birth through college and career. Each of the departments has its own board to oversee new or modified state policies and procedures. The Secretary of Education sits on each of the three boards. This structure, however, does not seem to have achieved the coordinated approach to education that was intended.

In 2010, in an effort to close the divide between student outcomes across demographics, the Massachusetts Legislature passed An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap in 2010. The act created intervention tools for underperforming schools, promoted local intervention, and allowed for a targeted increase in the charter school cap. The 2010 act also recognized the importance of investing in early education and care by requiring low-performing schools to offer pre-K, full-day kindergarten, and targeted reading interventions.¹¹

That same year, Strategies for Children commissioned Nonie Lesaux, professor of education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, to study the external and in-school barriers to improving third grade reading proficiency, starting from birth. The report, *Turning the Page: Refocusing Massachusetts for Reading Success*,

Figure 7

Massachusetts State Education Hierarchy



Source: Strategies for Children.

provided a set of actionable recommendations for both state policy and practice. Lesaux and her co-authors wrote, “43 percent of our third graders scored below proficient on the latest Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System reading test...We are doing a substandard job of serving all students.”¹²

Turning the Page recommended a comprehensive approach to early literacy that would increase the quality of children’s language and reading environments across many settings, from birth through third grade. The report called on the state to foster children’s development through high-quality program design and implementation for greater impact through the use of ongoing assessments of children and settings, redefined adult capacity-building models, language-rich and rigorous and engaging curricula, and partnerships with families focused on language and learning.

With its third grade reading law, Massachusetts is taking a different approach from that of other states. Rather than creating prescriptive third grade reading laws¹⁶ like many other states, Massachusetts is taking the time to first understand what causes student literacy gaps. The commonwealth is putting in place key components to make sure children and families have supports for early literacy skills starting at birth.

In 2011, Massachusetts applied for and won a federal Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant. The state received \$50 million over four years to institute its Early Learning Plan.¹⁷ EEC was the lead agency for oversight and implementation of the plan, elements of which included enhancing the quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), developing English language learner development standards, establishing a comprehensive assessment system, and improving early childhood data systems. The Executive Office of Education, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Department of Higher Education agreed to work together with EEC to implement these goals.¹⁸

To help bolster this work, the state won a \$15 million expansion grant under the federal Preschool Development Grants program in 2014, under the leadership of EEC Commissioner Tom Weber. The grant formalized many of the public-private partnerships that already existed throughout the state.

This July, newly elected Republican Governor Charlie Baker vetoed \$5 million in early education and care programs, and kindergarten expansion grants by \$17.6 million.¹⁹ Later that month, the commonwealth’s house

followed its senate, overriding those cuts and restoring dollars for early childhood.²⁰

The change in administration has made many early learning stakeholders and advocates in Massachusetts uneasy about the future. Chris Martes, President and CEO of Strategies for Children, said in a State House public hearing on investment in pre-K, “our goal is to increase the number of children who enter kindergarten ready to learn and succeed. That won’t happen without a larger state investment in early education.”²¹

An Act Relative to Third Grade Proficiency

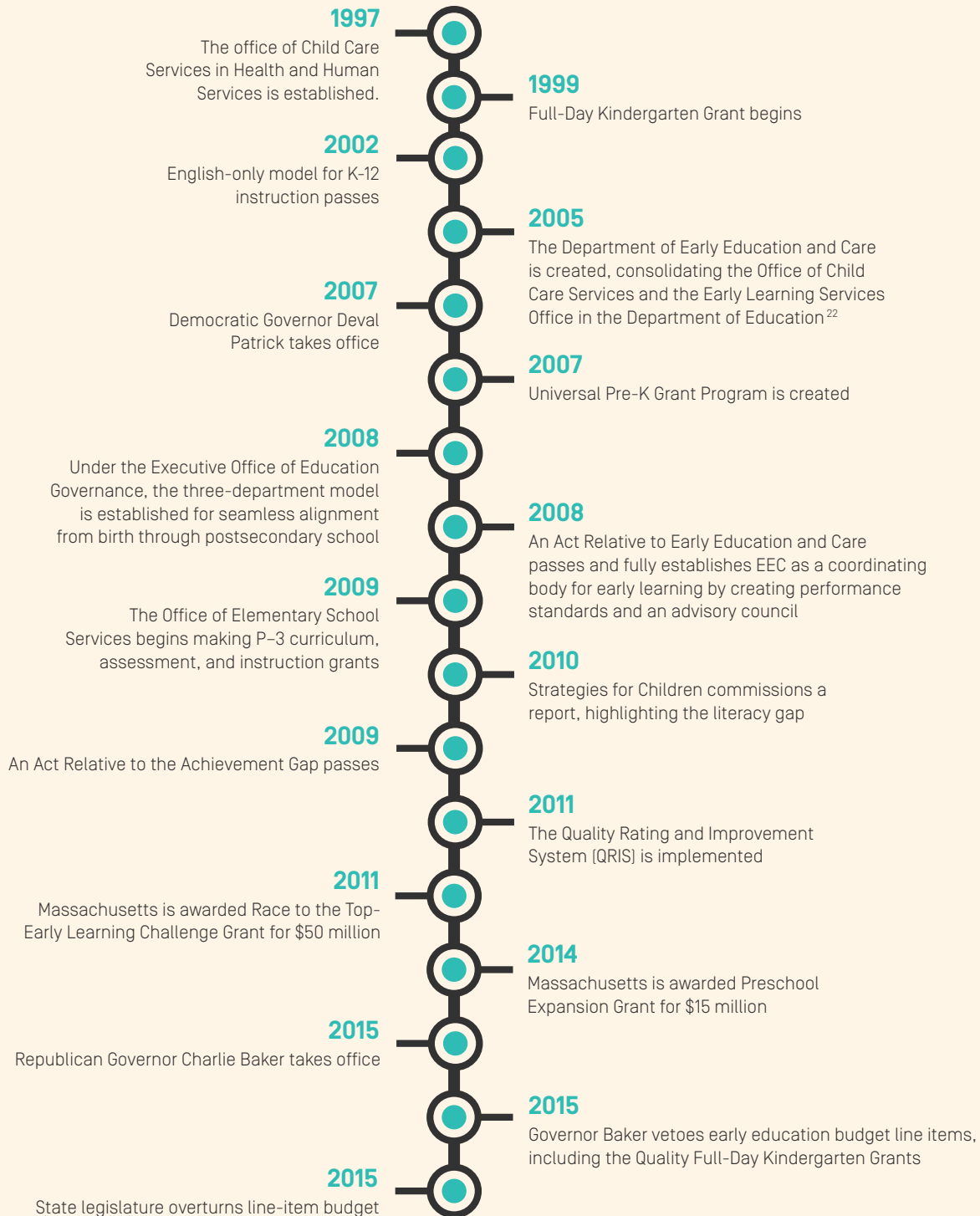
In 2012, Governor Deval Patrick (D) signed An Act Relative to Third Grade Reading Proficiency into law.¹³ This law addressed some of the actions from Nonie Lesaux’s *Turning the Page* report by creating a panel of literacy experts to provide recommendations to all three state departments of education and the Executive Office of Education to ensure that all students were reading proficiently by the end of third grade.¹⁴ The panel is focusing its recommendations on the following:

- Comprehensive, language-rich curricula
- Effective instructional practices
- Professional development and training
- Developmentally-appropriate assessment
- Family partnership strategies

The panel began work in 2013 and will continue to solidify recommendations for state early literacy policies, programs, and supports through 2016.¹⁵

Figure 8

Massachusetts Birth–3rd Timeline



EARLY EDUCATION POLICIES THAT SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

State and local efforts aimed at building literacy skills certainly can play a strong role in children's reading success, but so do other early education policies. State policies that recognize the wisdom of using developmental screenings at child care centers, providing access to high-quality infant and toddler programs as well as full-day pre-K and kindergarten, and helping develop a strong early education and care workforce can help ensure that children are on the path to read well by the time they complete third grade. Massachusetts has a number of initiatives and policies that can positively affect children's learning trajectories. The commonwealth's experience also offers lessons for other states struggling to improve children's literacy, educational, and life outcomes, particularly its emerging approach to kindergarten and its vision for a birth-through-third grade continuum.

Below we discuss several areas where the state is making progress as well as areas where work is still needed.

Birth Through Third Grade Alignment Strategy

Massachusetts is a state that adheres to the belief that learning begins at birth and it is working to align its resources accordingly. In 2013, as part of the state's first RTT-ELC grant, Massachusetts was able to provide B-3rd alignment partnership grants.²³ These competitive grants provide support to local communities to assess needs in early childhood and invest in public and private birth-to-age-eight programming that helps to improve student outcomes.²⁴ EEC chose high-need communities that had already demonstrated the ability to engage private and public stakeholders in the implementation of collaborative, community-wide programs for children across the B-3rd continuum. Localities have built community awareness regarding the importance of early education, and are now moving to invest in specific programs that work to increase student access to high-quality early learning environments.

These grants, distributed to five communities in 2012, established the collaboration between stakeholders that would lay the groundwork for future work with the 2014 federal Preschool Expansion Grants.²⁵ In the first round of the B-3rd alignment grants, the communities of Boston,²⁶ Springfield, Pittsfield, Lowell, and Somerville each received \$100,000 over two years. With these grants, local stakeholders have been able to build systems that create greater reading and math proficiency levels for children.²⁷ In the second round, the alignment grants expanded to support seven more communities around the state.²⁸

For instance, in Springfield the 2011 funding allowed the city to start to analyze best practices through a collaborative, mixed-delivery professional learning community (PLC). Teachers from community-based organizations (serving children from birth to kindergarten entry) met regularly with public school teachers who taught pre-K through kindergarten to collaborate and observe their peers in action. The exchange of information between educators in different settings has helped to promote better alignment for teachers and families throughout the city, easing the transition between birth-to-five programs and elementary schools.

As part of its RTT-ELC grant, the state has further supported the transition to kindergarten by undergoing an alignment study of its early learning and development standards. The study found a gap between the social-emotional learning standards for infants and toddlers and for pre-K and kindergarten. EEC and DESE updated their standards to include more robust social and emotional learning and new approaches to play and learning development in pre-K and kindergarten. The departments are also developing professional development modules to help administrators, teachers, and other professionals working with children and families coordinate the standards, which set the foundation for an integrated instructional approach across language and literacy, math, science, and social studies in pre-K and kindergarten.

The state-level B-3rd alignment approach has articulated a vision for collaboration and partnership in local communities. Even if Massachusetts is unable to sustain these grants after RTT-ELC funds run out, the local relationships developed and B-3rd mindset established could go a long way toward continuing the progress made.

Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

While most states, including Massachusetts, have invested in Quality Rating & Improvement Systems (QRIS) to at least some extent, there is little evidence that these program-evaluation systems improve or differentiate program quality. However, states can include in their QRIS measures of program quality such as use of evidence-based curricula, positive child-teacher interactions, and use of screenings and assessments. As required by RTT-ELC grants, winning states are conducting validation studies to determine if and how well the tiers in QRIS are related to children's kindergarten readiness. Massachusetts' QRIS validation study will be completed in early 2016.

When the QRIS was first piloted in the state in 2010, then-Commissioner of EEC, Sherri Killins, said it "was an opportunity to define quality over and above licensing. Massachusetts starts out ahead of that. We start off with the high licensing standards...I think that the field needs resources in order to be successful."²⁹ In 2011 the Massachusetts QRIS became fully operational, evaluating school-based, center-based, family-based, and before- and after-school programs. The discussion below centers primarily on standards for center-based programs.

Even though participation in the QRIS is voluntary, to be eligible for certain types of state-funded initiatives, programs must participate. These initiatives include:

- Universal pre-K grants
- Inclusive preschool learning environment grants
- QRIS improvement grants
- Some types of child care subsidies³⁰

Massachusetts programs are evaluated on their curriculum and learning, safety of indoor and outdoor environments, workforce qualifications and professional development, family and community engagement, and

leadership, management, and administration. Ratings are valid for two years. The current system has four tiers to attempt to differentiate the quality of centers, but the state is exploring adding a fifth tier to further distinguish best practices.³¹

As of February 2014, about 5,000 programs across the state participated in the QRIS.³² More than 3,300 of those programs were family child care providers.³³ EEC began granting level three programs in March of 2014, and level four programs in November of 2014. Since this time, 191 programs have been granted a level three rating, and 14 programs have been granted a level four rating.³⁴ EEC plans to boost its program quality staff to help centers move from tiers one and two.

For center-based programs, the level four rating requires at least one educator in every classroom with a bachelor's degree or higher and specialization in early childhood education or a related field.³⁵ This requirement for center-based programs is closely aligned with the recommendation in the Institute of Medicine's recent report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8*. Some level three programs have experienced difficulty with the recruitment and retention of teachers and teacher assistants with bachelor's degrees, preventing these programs from moving to the highest tier, according to our interviews with Head Start teachers in Springfield.³⁶ Attaining this goal will take time, an evaluation of the capacity of two-year and four-year institutions to prepare future and current educators, professional learning opportunities for current staff, and attention to compensation and work conditions in centers.

Right now, when programs move from level one to a higher tier, they are eligible for a slightly higher reimbursement rate (3 percent above the base rate) for children receiving child care subsidies.³⁷ Massachusetts provides multiple resources on the EEC website, a QRIS learning community, and small grants, ranging from about \$4,500 to \$10,500, for programs to improve overall quality or home in on a particular area. Programs can also receive technical assistance and professional development opportunities based on their needs. Still, there are many center- and family-based child care providers with diverse needs and a limited state capacity to meet those needs.³⁸ (See the box on page 16 for other ways the EEC and the Department of Higher Education are attempting to build the workforce in early education, which can help programs in the QRIS to move to levels three and four.)

Developmental Screening and Home Visiting

In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, there are about 135,000 children, from birth to age five, at risk for exposure to violence and economic instability.⁴⁴ Without effective interventions in early education and care programs, these children, especially those experiencing multiple risk factors, could suffer from debilitating developmental delays, which negatively impact language and literacy development. One way to help make sure children and families get the proper supports is to screen children as early as possible for developmental and health markers. EEC coordinates early childhood

screening and assessment across the state, providing vision, health, and hearing screenings, in addition to a mobile dentist.⁴⁵ Statewide, screening tools are used in both formal and informal care settings. Fifty-three percent of all Massachusetts' children under the age of six received developmental screenings in 2012, compared to only 30 percent of children nationwide.⁴⁶

Developmental screenings are a requirement of the state's tiered QRIS for levels 2, 3, and 4. Massachusetts provides training and technical assistance for providers and caregivers to support early childhood assessment, screening, and program measurement aligned with

Strengthening the Birth-to-Five Workforce in Massachusetts

A common criticism among providers in the early childhood system, nationally, has been the lack of professionalization, as well as low wages and benefits. It is difficult for Head Start, non-profit, and for-profit center directors to retain teachers with bachelor's degrees when they cannot pay a living wage or provide competitive benefits. Although there are some teachers with bachelor's degrees who continue to serve young children despite lack of adequate pay, many teachers who are trained in centers and attain bachelor's degrees leave to work in the public school system where they can often double or triple their pay.³⁹

"For the bachelor's degree standard to work more effectively in the QRIS, the policy should be phased in with an increase in wages for providers who have earned their bachelor's degrees," said Doug McNally, coordinator at the Berkshire Readiness Center. The *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8* report agrees with this assessment, recommending that "state leadership and licensure and accreditation agencies, state and local stakeholders in care and education, and institutions of higher education...collaboratively develop a multi-year, phased, multi-component, coordinated strategy to set the expectation that lead educators...have at a minimum a bachelor's degree and specialization."⁴⁰

The injection of more money into Massachusetts' QRIS to expand the improvement grants and a more significant increase in child care subsidy reimbursement rates could go a long way in helping centers to retain qualified teachers and hence move up to the higher tiers. In the Boston area, for instance, the state's subsidy reimbursement rate is well below the federal recommended reimbursement rate of 75 percent of market rate.⁴¹

Despite the state's QRIS efforts to move toward a universal bachelor's degree requirement for early childhood educators, there is a dominant belief in the field that teachers with the right personality type can be trained to deliver good instruction and engage in powerful teacher-child interactions. One director said, "hire for attitude; teach for skill,"⁴² which means that hiring teachers with a passion for working with children and building up their pedagogical skills over time without the bachelor's degree can also lead to good outcomes for children. While 22 states mandate that their pre-K teachers have bachelor's degrees, no state mandates a bachelor's degree for all teachers in birth-to-five programs.⁴³ The *Transforming the Workforce* report suggested the goal of requiring a bachelor's degree and specialization in early childhood education for all lead teachers of children birth-to-eight, but suggests 10 years for the attainment of this goal, recognizing the significant challenges that must be addressed to get there.

the QRIS. Infant and toddler developmental screenings and assessments are vital to making sure that children are reaching milestones within a normal range⁴⁷ and capturing this information in the state's early care and education data system would be beneficial to teachers and programs.

One way to provide interventions for a developmental concern is through a research-based home visiting program. The Massachusetts Home Visiting Initiative is an inter-agency partnership between the Department of Public Health and EEC.⁴⁸ This initiative is partially funded through the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program,⁴⁹ and focuses home visiting and community supports in 17 high-need communities. Some home visiting models across these communities include Healthy Families Massachusetts, Early Head Start, and Parents as Teachers.⁵⁰

In Pittsfield, one of EEC's high-need communities, the Parent Child Home Program (PCHP) is one of the home visiting programs used as a part of the city's B-3rd alignment grant strategy. Families are referred to the program when identified with two or more risk factors. Currently, the program helps two- and three-year-olds become school-ready by pre-K.

Participating families are visited twice per week. The home visitor introduces a lesson (all of which are literacy-based) to the child and parent during the first visit. During the second one, the visitor observes the parent doing the same lesson with his or her child. This program encourages positive interactions between the parent (or other caregiver) and child, and is aligned with the goals of the Pittsfield Promise, a city-wide campaign to raise awareness about the importance of early learning and early literacy. Each week the family receives a book and corresponding toy, both of which stay in the home to continue promoting literacy and positive parent-child interaction after the visitor is gone.⁵¹ Home visitors evaluate their interactions with children and families through the use of the ASQ screener and a Parent/Child Behavior Trait assessment, both used as a pre- and post-test. Anecdotal notes are also used as a progress monitoring measure.

In Pittsfield, the PCHP has been active in promoting early literacy for the past 45 years. The program was originally funded and managed by Pittsfield Public Schools (PPS) through Title I funds. In the 1990s, PPS reallocated the Title I funding for PCHP, moving money from the middle schools to support programming. PCHP reached its peak by 2000, with 12 home visitors and 120 families. In 2004,

the program underwent funding cuts that reduced the staff and families to half. Subsequently, the program applied for and received funding through a state family engagement grant.⁵² This funding allowed for 20 families to be served. Another round of budget cuts came this spring, with PPS ending its support of the program. Roseanne McDevitt, PPS' former PCHP coordinator, wrote, "it's heartbreaking to think that after 45 years in Pittsfield PCHP may be considered expendable." She continued, "as I was walking down the hall at school recently, I stopped to look at the photos of children holding their principal's award certificates. Almost half of them were PCHP alumni," she said in a letter to the editor of *The Berkshire Eagle*.⁵³

With the state family engagement grant and funding through Berkshire United Way, another entity, Child Care of the Berkshires, now is operating the program. Even though PCHP has been greatly diminished in Pittsfield, it is gaining momentum in other school districts throughout Berkshire County.

Pre-K Strategy

Access to high-quality pre-K can help children to build skills across multiple domains, laying the foundation for strong literacy skills in the later grades. In 2007, the Massachusetts legislature included the Universal Pre-K (UPK) competitive grant program in the state budget. Under UPK, private and public full-day, full-year programs serving pre-K children (ages two years and nine-months-old to five-years) are eligible for the funds to support quality. In fiscal year 2014, awards were set at a maximum of \$15,000 per grant.⁵⁴

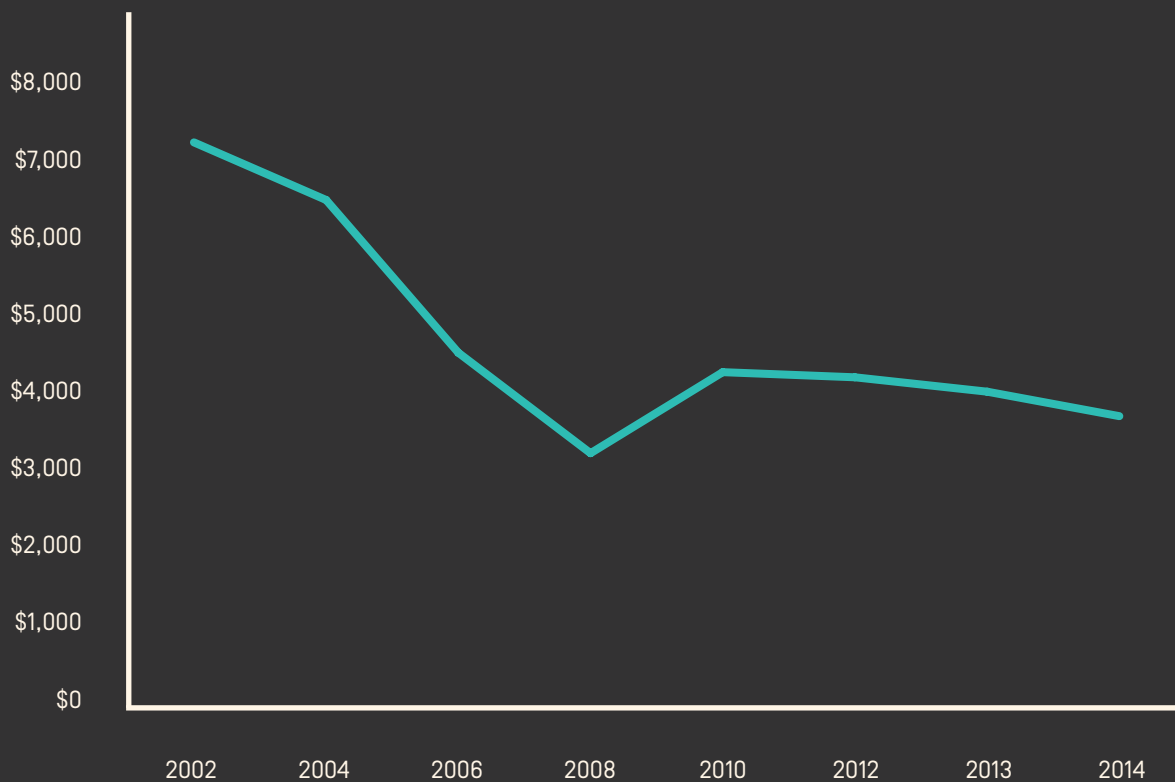
With the UPK grant, programs are required to use a Department of Early Education and Care's approved formative assessment tool for at least one year (with incentives to continue use), follow the state early learning standards, and serve or be willing to serve low-income or at-risk families.⁵⁵ The grant program supports an already robust mixed-delivery system throughout the state.

Although the UPK grant has slightly improved the quality of care and extended the length of day for some young children, it has not greatly expanded access to pre-K. Since the grant's implementation, there has not been a significant increase in the number of pre-K children being served throughout the state. Between 2008 and 2010, there was just a 3 percent increase in the number of four-year-old children served, for a total of 14 percent of eligible children. However, during that same period, there

was a 6 percent decrease in the number of three-year-olds served. Pre-K access remained relatively stagnant for the following four years.⁵⁶ In 2014, Massachusetts still served 14 percent of its four-year-olds and 4 percent of its three-year-olds.⁵⁷

The flat enrollment is of little surprise, considering a steady decrease in funding for the grants over the past five years. Recently, to account for reduced funding, EEC has had to restrict most of the grants to programs applying for renewals, only offering funding to a limited number of new pre-K programs.⁵⁸ In 2013–2014, the state

Figure 9
Massachusetts Spending per Child Enrolled, in 2014 Dollars



Source: W. Steven Barnett, Megan E. Carolan, James H. Squires, Kirsty Clarke Brown, and Michelle Horowitz, "Massachusetts," part of *The State of Preschool 2014* [Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2014], <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/Massachusetts2.pdf>.

issued \$6 million in renewal grants and little more than \$690,000 for new programs.

Although the focus in Massachusetts seems to be more on quality improvement and less on expansion, the commonwealth only meets six of 10 quality benchmarks used by National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) to evaluate state pre-k programs: early learning standards, teacher in-service training, maximum class size, staff-teacher ratio, screening, and program monitoring. The state does not require a bachelor's degree for lead pre-K teachers or a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential for assistant teachers. These requirements are, however, built into certain tiers of the state's QRIS, as discussed previously.

The need for high-quality pre-K programs across the state is great. In some communities pre-K expansion is moving ahead with help from the federal Preschool Development Grant program. In 2014, when Massachusetts won the award, state officials were excited about the opportunity to serve more four-year-olds in high-quality settings. Tom Weber, the current Commissioner of Early Education and Care, stated that the department's mission is to not just provide families with greater access to pre-K, but to provide greater access to high-quality pre-K.⁵⁹ The Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG) programs, as they are called in the Bay State, will not only expand access to pre-K, but will also help to raise the overall quality of pre-K programs by raising teacher salaries to a level that competes with those of public school teachers. To leverage the work already happening in Massachusetts B-3rd grant communities, the state selected several of them as the PEG subgrantees: Springfield, Lowell, Lawrence, Holyoke, and Boston.

Each of these communities has large numbers of children from low-income families not participating in high-quality early learning programs. In September, the first cohort (750 four-year-olds) began attending pre-K across the five communities. Each student in a PEG pre-K program will receive a State Assigned Student Identification (SASID) that will allow data to be tracked longitudinally. The SASID number will provide useful information for districts to help make sure that children remain on the path toward graduation. Massachusetts has plans to eventually capture data for all children attending early learning programs and connect those data to its K-12 longitudinal data system.⁶⁰

EEC identified the programs that would be part of each community's PEG partnership. In Springfield the partners include Square One, Springfield Public Schools, Holyoke-

Chicopee-Springfield Head Start, and the YMCA of Greater Springfield. With its B-3rd alignment grant, Springfield had already fostered strong bonds among these partners. Even so, the timeline to get the PEG sites up and running was short, and there was a space challenge, since the Springfield public school system did not have much space for more four-year-olds in elementary school buildings.

These separate pre-K providers came together as The Springfield Cooperative Preschool to provide the community's PEG pre-K program in one building, purchased and renovated by the school district.⁶¹ The ability for different providers to work together in the same building deepens the partnership and furthers educational continuity for children and families. For instance, there is opportunity for shared professional development between Head Start, private early childhood providers, and public school teachers within the same building.

In Boston, the PEG partnership includes Boston Public Schools (BPS), the Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), Nurtury, and the YMCA of Greater Boston.⁶² The PEG will help build on efforts already made by BPS to align its early education system through the creation of its K1DS program. Through the K1DS program, BPS and 10 non-public school providers across the city partnered to create 14 classrooms with high-quality curricula, higher educational requirements for teachers and higher salaries, professional development, and instructional coaching. K1DS programs named as recipients of the PEG in Boston include Paige Academy, Ellis Memorial Early Education Center, Nazareth Child Care Center, Yawkey Konbit-Kreyol Center, and Wesley Child Care Center.

BPS coaches specializing in early education conduct frequent observations and provide regular feedback to K1DS teachers to help strengthen their instruction. BPS is expanding its coaching approach to the other PEG programs. When BPS extended its high-quality coaching and curriculum to community-based programs, it was able to support directors and provide higher compensation for lead teachers. This method helps to standardize the city's expectations for student outcomes across pre-K settings and demographics. In collaboration with Nonie Lesaux, BPS's high-quality literacy- and center-based curriculum was expanded to kindergarten and is currently being piloted in first grade. A second grade curriculum is under development.

In January, State Representative Alice Peisch (D) and State Senator Sal DiDomenico (D) filed legislation to

Countdown to Kindergarten

Boston Public Schools has a quick online reference for families, translated into six different languages, on how to help children transition to kindergarten.⁶³ There is a timeline for kindergarten registration and for a scheduled visit to the new school. A coordinated transition plan is helpful for kids and families to acclimate to their new school environments. The guide also helps families to understand developmentally-appropriate expectations in a kindergarten classroom, highlighting the importance of play to foster early learning.

expand pre-K to at-risk children in Massachusetts through a state grant.⁶⁴ An Act Ensuring High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten Education, if passed, would expand quality pre-K seats based on the results of districts' third grade reading scores. This means districts with lower scores would have faster expansion of pre-K seats than others. This legislation, which includes requirements similar to PEG, has the potential to expand high-quality, full-day pre-K to the most at-risk three- and four-year-old children across the state by requiring teacher salaries comparable to the K-12 system, mandating a bachelor's degree for lead teachers, and ensuring children have access to pre-K in their home districts.

Dual Language Learners

Massachusetts established transitional bilingual education (TBE) in 1969 during school desegregation.⁶⁵ Under a federal court order, the state was forced to create bilingual education programs. TBE was historically underfunded and did not lead to a rise in test results among English learners.⁶⁶ In 2002, Massachusetts voters overwhelmingly passed a ballot initiative requiring public schools to adhere to an English-only model for instruction in K-12. This law replaced the bilingual education model that the state had used for over 30 years. At the time of the law's passage, a little over 50,000 children were classified

as dual language learners (DLLs) in the public school system.⁶⁷ Today, there are over 81,000 DLLs, a 62 percent increase in this population.⁶⁸ Massachusetts is one of only a handful of states that adhere to the English-only practice in its public schools.⁶⁹

It is a different story for children prior to entering kindergarten. In the Bay State, more than one in four children under the age of six live in households that speak a language other than English.⁷⁰ According to 2013 Kids Count Data, 22 percent of children in the commonwealth have a home language other than English.⁷¹ The Massachusetts Executive Office of Education states that there must be a focus on early learning for DLLs and meaningful engagement of their parents and communities in order to prepare children for success in school.

When a child enters the public school system in Massachusetts, his or her parent or guardian is given a survey that asks for the family's home language. If that language is different from English, the child is given a screening to determine his or her English proficiency. Depending on the results, a kindergartener could be placed either in a sheltered English immersion (SEI) classroom or an English language mainstream classroom with assistance in English acquisition. If there are 38 or more DLL students in a district, every core academic general education teacher in early childhood and elementary must have a Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) endorsement so that he or she is prepared to meet the needs of these students.⁷² The purpose of SEI is to ensure children have intense exposure to English while being taught core academic content. Children are "exited" from these specialized language services once they demonstrate a sufficient level of English language proficiency.

This screening process can lead to kindergarten classrooms comprised primarily, or even solely, of English language learners.⁷³ Sequestering DLLs in a sheltered English immersion classroom in kindergarten goes against much of the research that shows the importance of peers in language acquisition. Additionally, banning instruction in languages other than English is out of line with research that demonstrates that young students do better when they learn to read and write in their first languages while also learning to read and write in English.⁷⁴

Some non-public school early education programs take on the responsibility to support a dual-language approach to English acquisition. For instance, the Action

for Boston Community Development (ABCD), a large scale, multi-service, anti-poverty program focused on the greater Boston area, is a good example of a dual-generation, community-based program focused on serving DLL children and their families. ABCD uses multiple strategies to support home language and English language development. Although instruction takes place primarily in English, children are placed in classrooms with educators who speak their home languages, allowing for home-language use when appropriate to support learning.

One of the programs that ABCD administers is Head Start; its program serves 2,502 low-income children and families each year.⁷⁵ The ABCD Jamaica Plain Head Start serves mostly Spanish-speaking families originating from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. With a UPK grant, Jamaica Plain Head Start purchased culturally sensitive books that cater to students' linguistic and cultural needs. In addition, ABCD partners with AmeriCorps to provide foster grandparents⁷⁶ in the classroom who often speak the children's home languages and help bridge the gap between home and school. There are also lead teachers and assistant teachers that speak languages other than English in both the Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms to foster development in both languages. Some administrators and teachers in the program are able to speak to families in their home languages. There is also real-time translation at all parent meetings.

Yet, despite the program's commitment to supporting children's home languages, teachers clearly understand the implications of the state's English-only mandate. At Jamaica Plain Head Start, one of the teachers said, "Head Start's goal is to get all of its dual language learners into an English [speaker's] classroom."⁷⁷ Another teacher stated that her goal is to make sure children learn enough English to survive kindergarten.⁷⁸

The commonwealth is taking some steps to align learning standards for English language learners. In 2013, EEC adopted national *Early English Language Learner Development Standards*, developed in partnership with the World-Class Instructional Design Assessment (WIDA) Early Years, and created to align with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education English language development standards for K–12. EEC has trainings to help providers implement and integrate the new standards into their daily practice.⁷⁹

The state is taking steps to bring back bilingual education. In May, House Bill 498 was introduced in the state legislature, seeking to expand instruction to

serve a growing bilingual and multilingual population of students by fostering children's home languages in addition to English.⁸⁰ The bill would allow public and charter schools in K–12 to return to using transitional bilingual education as well as dual immersion models.

Full-day Kindergarten

Research shows that full-day kindergarten provides students with more exposure to a high-quality early learning environment than half-day programs do.⁸¹ And since the state requires pre-K programs receiving money from UPK grants or PEG to be offered for a full day it only makes sense for those programs to be followed by a full day of kindergarten. Yet, under Massachusetts law, districts are only required to offer part-day kindergarten during the academic year.⁸² Additionally, the state allows districts to charge families tuition to enroll their children in full-day kindergarten; 38 other states ban this practice.⁸³

Despite the lack of statutory provisions for full-day kindergarten, the state offers the Quality Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK) Grant to districts as a funding supplement to extend part-day programs to full-day and to improve overall program quality. The grant awards are administered by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Just over half of the school districts with kindergarten enrollment in Massachusetts receive this grant, including all of the largest urban districts.

The funding helps to supplement programs in different ways. For example, BPS funds full-day kindergarten in all of its elementary schools.⁸⁴ BPS uses the extra funding from the FDK Grant to pay for part-time paraprofessionals, allowing for better teacher-child ratios in the kindergarten classrooms. In Springfield and Pittsfield, the funding supports the implementation of a full-day kindergarten program, such as paying for teacher professional development and appropriate class sizes.⁸⁵ One challenge with the grant is that it pays per classroom instead of per pupil, leading to disparities in funding because some classrooms may be larger or have greater needs than others.

While some districts, such as BPS, have had little trouble meeting NAEYC standards, others have struggled for a variety of reasons that often include limited funding to meet ratio requirements and other quality standards. This year, in an effort to keep a focus on quality in kindergarten, but also to provide districts with an

alternative to accreditation, DESE pulled together early childhood coordinators from around the state as well as staff from EEC to develop a set of elements and indicators for high-quality kindergarten classrooms and a companion pilot self-assessment tool for districts that receive a Quality FDK Grant.⁸⁶ The elements include:

- Learning environment
- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Assessment of children
- Leadership and professional development
- Family engagement
- Assessment of program quality

The elements and indicators are largely based on research-based practices and NAEYC's principles for developmentally appropriate practice in kindergarten.

DESE is piloting the elements and self-assessment tool with current grantees, asking districts to take up two tasks: 1) complete the self-assessment, identify two areas for improvement, and develop a plan for changes that can be made between January and June of 2016; and 2) provide feedback to the state on the pilot tools. DESE intends to make changes based on its learning from the tools' use and challenges raised by districts.

During the state's fiscal year 2016 budget approval, the FDK Grant hung in the balance. Governor Baker vetoed the grant line-item funding. Many districts expressed uncertainty about whether they would be able to maintain their full-day kindergarten classrooms without this additional support from the state. Ultimately, the legislature overrode the governor and restored funding for the grant.^{87, 88} While the FDK Grant does not cover the entire cost of providing full-day kindergarten, it has been vital to enable districts to offer full-day kindergarten and also lower costs for families.

Kindergarten Entry Assessment

The value of kindergarten entry assessments (KEA) is to provide teachers with snapshot information early in the school year about what their students know and are able to do across multiple domains including math, literacy,

Kindergarten Entrance Age

Massachusetts allows local education agencies to determine their own kindergarten entrance age without any parameters.⁸⁹ Only six other states allow this practice.⁹⁰ In Pittsfield, the decentralization of the entrance age has led to families crossing districts to attend kindergarten in places with a later cutoff age, and then switching back to their community schools for first grade, disrupting the continuity of education in the early years. This practice is possible because of the 1991 Massachusetts school choice law that allows families to send their children to schools outside of their assigned school boundaries.⁹¹ School committees choose whether or not to become school choice receiving districts, and designate a maximum number of available school choice seats for an upcoming year.⁹² The combination of the school choice option with the various kindergarten entrance ages can lead to discontinuity within the early childhood continuum.

and social-emotional learning. KEA results also provide information for policymakers about school readiness across the state as long as there is a common assessment used across districts.

With Massachusetts' winning RTT-ELC grant application in 2011 came the need to implement a new kindergarten entry assessment. In its application, EEC officials said they would complete a pilot and implement an assessment statewide, but the commonwealth has had challenges in rolling out that plan.

Pittsfield was one of the first districts to implement the KEA. At the time, the EEC told districts that they would have to implement the KEA if they received the Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grant and that they could implement the Work Sampling System (WSS) or Teaching Strategies GOLD. Pittsfield trained all of its kindergarten teachers on the WSS, but many found it challenging

to implement this tool into their everyday practice and had difficulties seeing the benefit. Then in the 2014–2015 school year, EEC required the new cohort of districts to implement only TS GOLD. Pittsfield district officials became concerned that they would be forced to make the change, potentially stirring up the issue for the teachers union. The Massachusetts Teachers Association raised concerns about the implementation of the KEA at the state level.⁹³

In fact, EEC is allowing districts currently using the WSS to continue doing so, though officials are encouraging them to switch to TS GOLD for the purpose of comparability across the state. Massachusetts only committed to paying for the WSS license through the 2014–2015 school year, and while it may continue to fund it for the 2015–2016 school year, there are no plans to do so after RTT-ELC funds end. Most districts did switch to using TS GOLD.

In Boston, the KEA was also met with consternation. The addition of another assessment at the kindergarten level was seen as superfluous because other assessments were already in use. The district will use the DIBELS monitoring reading assessment and the WSS to assess students’ social-emotional and cognitive development, which is Option 1 in the chart below.

The overall lack of teacher buy-in for the KEA assessment was evident when the Massachusetts Teachers Association declared that it was against the use of the TS GOLD assessment system in kindergarten. Recognizing the issues with the implementation of the measure, and in an effort to foster better communication, EEC sent out a survey to kindergarten teachers and administrators asking for feedback on the best way to improve the current KEA.⁹⁴

Table 2
KEA Implementation Options for Fiscal Year 2016

Option 1 — Standard KEA plan: EEC has training supports	Socio-emotional and cognitive domains with selected indicators in TS GOLD or equivalent domains in WSS with a fall and spring deadline
Option 2 — Standard KEA plan: EEC has training supports	Six domains (language, literacy, math, social-emotional, cognitive, physical) with selected indicators in TS GOLD or equivalent domains in WSS with a fall and spring deadline
Option 3 — Alternative KEA plan	All six domains of TS GOLD without checkpoints or with district-determined deadlines
Option 4 — Alternative KEA plan	Selected indicators of TS GOLD without checkpoints or with district-determined deadlines
Option 5 — Alternative KEA plan	Another observational tool with social-emotional and cognitive development domain

Source: Massachusetts Teachers Association, “Options for FY16 Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment Implementation,” http://www.massteacher.org/issues_and_action/~media/Files/kindergarten_assessments/mkea_options.pdf.

In response to the survey, which closed at the end of March, EEC began to adapt the implementation of the KEA to meet the needs of districts. Depending on the stage of implementation, the districts that receive the Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grants can choose from five options. EEC has scaled back its implementation of a common KEA due to initial communication problems with the districts and the need to train teachers on how to conduct observational assessments.

The new phased-in implementation, paired with training supports for those districts closer to full implementation, should enable EEC to reach its goal of having all districts with full-day kindergarten grants using a KEA. However, because EEC has decided to give leeway to districts in terms of the tool(s) they choose, it is highly unlikely that Massachusetts will end up with a single, multi-domain, common KEA, making comparisons complicated. Further, questions remain about whether this information will be captured in the state's data system and whether the commonwealth will be able to continue supporting KEA implementation when the RTT-ELC funding ends.

Educator Credentialing

Building an early childhood education workforce with strong content knowledge and pedagogy is imperative to developing strong readers. The science of language and literacy development must be a key component of educator credentials, particularly for educators who teach children language, communication, writing, and reading skills. For the youngest learners, teachers play an important role in building early language and social-emotional skills.

Early childhood education credentials in Massachusetts are somewhat complex because there are two tracks for lead teacher licensure and two tracks for assistant teacher licensure, dependent on the pre-K setting. This does not include alternative certification routes. One track is through EEC. The other teacher certification track is through DESE, for teachers in the public pre-K setting.

Credentialing must be adaptable to fit a mixed-delivery system with providers of varying educational backgrounds, but differences in expectations for and baseline knowledge of lead and assistant teachers in both public school and non-public school settings can lead to some disparities in student outcomes.⁹⁹

In 2012–2013, the commissioner of EEC and the commissioner of DESE created a joint Early Education

Credentialing must be adaptable to fit a mixed-delivery system with providers of varying educational backgrounds, but differences in expectations for and baseline knowledge of lead and assistant teachers in both public school and non-public school settings can lead to some disparities in student outcomes.

to Higher Education advisory group to focus on early childhood educators, particularly in center-based settings, to help build the workforce, increase its access to college, and bridge the gap in baseline knowledge and qualifications between pre-K teachers in different settings.¹⁰⁰ One of the recommendations from this group was to create a single, unified credential system that spanned birth through second grade. As Winnie Hagan of the Department of Higher Education noted in an interview, “the foundational coursework should be the same whether you are working with babies or second graders, regardless of the credential or license.”¹⁰¹ This recommended credential, however, would not replace the pre-K through second grade teaching license nor would it lead to teaching in a public school.

Creating one licensure system that spans the early childhood developmental spectrum could lead to a more prepared workforce by ensuring all teachers have foundational knowledge, skills, and experiences. The challenge to develop this credential system is that it spans three departments—EEC, DHE, and DESE—which could make it difficult to implement and administer.

Table 3
Pathways to Early Childhood Credentialing

Certification	Course Requirement/ Degree Requirement	Substitutions for Course/Degree Requirement	Prior Work Experience/Practicum (or Student Teaching) and Substitutions
<i>EEC Certification for Level I: Infant-Toddler or Preschool Teacher (Assistant teacher qualifications)</i> ⁹⁵	At least 21 years old or have a high school diploma AND complete a three-credit course in child growth and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential • Human growth and development course • Graduation from an approved child care high school program (since 1989) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 months of supervised work experience • An associate's or bachelor's degree in early childhood education will substitute for 6 months of work experience • A bachelor's degree in an unrelated field will substitute for 3 months of work experience • A continuing education unit in infant and toddler development, care, and/or program planning may substitute for 3 months of work experience
<i>DESE Certification for a Paraprofessional in Pre-K Title I School</i> ⁹⁶	High school diploma or equivalent AND an associate's degree	Or 48 college credit hours or completion of formal MA- endorsed paraprofessional assessment	No requirement
<i>EEC Certification for Level II: Lead Infant-Toddler or Preschool Teacher</i> ⁹⁷	Must be at least 21 years old and meet all assistant teacher qualification AND complete an additional 9 credits in early childhood education	CDA, or 4 CEUs replace 3 credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36 months of experience with a high school diploma or G.E.D., or • 27 months of experience with a credential such as a CDA, community college, or Montessori credential, or • 18 months of experience with an associate's degree in early childhood education or a related field, or • 9 months of experience with a bachelor's or advanced degree in early childhood education or a related field • Student teaching substitutes for 9 months of experience
<i>DESE Certification for Early Childhood: Teacher of student with or without disabilities (PreK-2nd Grade Teacher Certification, includes pre-K teacher)</i> ⁹⁸	Bachelor's degree AND completion of an approved program AND passing communications and literacy skills test, passing score on early childhood education subject matter test, a TBE or SEI Endorsement	Alternative public school teacher certification routes or transfer of teacher license from another state	300 hours of practicum (100 hours in PreK-K, 200 hours in grades 1-2; at least one setting must include children with disabilities)

Source: The Massachusetts Executive Office of Education, "Early Education and Care (EEC) Professional Certification," <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/workforce-and-professional-development/educator-certifications/early-education-care-professional-certification/eec-professional-certification.html>.

In 2013, with the help of a \$25,000 grant and technical assistance from the National Governors Association (NGA), the Birth to Grade 3 Advisory Group, including all three education agencies and facilitated by the Executive Office of Education, began work on this concept of an Early Educator credential system. The groups are still working.

The issue of comparable credentialing is tied to the increase in educational attainment qualifications for pre-K teachers outside the public school setting. The ability to have one certification that spans the

B–3rd continuum, in conjunction with the bachelor’s degree requirement, could lead to greater continuity in instruction as children progress from early care environments to pre-K and beyond. Conversations about educational requirements and credentialing for pre-K teachers, though, should take place in tandem with conversations about creating a pay scale that is comparable to K–12, regardless of classroom setting. Without both pieces in place, there should be no surprise when high-quality pre-K teachers in non-public school programs leave when a position with more appropriate compensation opens up.

Stackable Credentials ¹⁰²

To build a more skilled early education and care workforce, one of Massachusetts’ strategies has been to build a system based on stackable credentials.¹⁰³ Stackable credentials are sequenced and build upon one another so that early childhood educators can move up the career ladder through experience and the accumulation of skills.¹⁰⁴ The state legislature funded an early childhood educator scholarship for teachers and caregivers in all settings:

Table 4
Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Program

Institution Type	Maximum Award Amounts
University of Massachusetts	\$500 per credit, maximum of \$4,500 per semester
Private College/University	\$500 per credit, maximum of \$4,500 per semester
State University	\$400 per credit, maximum of \$3,600 per semester
Community College	\$250 per credit, maximum of \$2,250 per semester

Source: The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, Office of Student Financial Assistance, “Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Program,” <http://www.mass.edu/osfa/programs/earlychildhooded.asp>.

Focus on Boston Public Schools

“Early childhood education is a key strategy to closing the opportunity and achievement gap,” interim BPS superintendent John McDonough said in a speech to a crowd of educators in May.¹⁰⁵ Jason Sachs, the director of early childhood education at BPS, agrees. The district relies heavily on data-driven professional learning to help educators deliver high-quality instruction with fidelity to its newly minted kindergarten curriculum.¹⁰⁶ (The kindergarten curriculum is an open education resource that can be used and adopted by any district around the state and country.) This curriculum is slowly being implemented across BPS and will eventually span pre-K through third grade.

Sachs is data-driven and focused on improving early education through the use of high-quality curricula, teacher coaching, and professional development. Coaches evaluate teachers’ skills through observations. Depending on a random sampling of teachers’ strengths and weaknesses district-wide, the Early Childhood Education team at BPS will create targeted coaching, which “supports systemic change,” Sachs says.

Teacher coaching has also been a vital method for implementing change across the district in community-based K1DS programs and within BPS. Through a teacher-coaching model, the district was able to slowly transform its kindergarten classrooms to focus more on play-based, student-centered instruction. After the change in environment, change in instructional practices soon followed. The Early Ed team at BPS plans the same for first grade and second grade. The focus on curriculum and good professional coaching helps keep teachers up-to-date about the best practices for building their students’ academic as well as social and emotional skills.

Sachs also encourages early education buy-in from principals, and he maintains quality through the use of NAEYC accreditation for pre-k and kindergarten programs. Principals want their schools to have the NAEYC accreditation status and will help to build systems that support high-quality instruction within their buildings. Like QRIS, NAEYC accreditation criteria assesses birth through kindergarten programs for relationships, curriculum, teaching, assessment of child progress, and health.¹⁰⁷

In addition to raising the quality of instruction through strong curriculum, BPS holds a kindergarten conference every year, during which pre-K and kindergarten teachers create a shared vision, setting expectations for children. The conference is designed to ease the transition between mixed-delivery pre-K programs and public kindergarten programs.

DESE sees what is happening in Boston as a model for the rest of the state, in emphasizing the principles behind the kindergarten curriculum. Nina Schlikin, ESE’s director of literacy and humanities, sees the shift in principles and the learning experiences provided to children as what will make the difference for child outcomes. Massachusetts will offer districts professional development that focuses on the key ideas included in Boston’s curriculum. For those districts interested in a deeper and more long-term K–3 approach, the state plans to provide personalized coaching to help teachers and principals make the needed instructional shifts to incorporate a more inquiry-based and student-centered approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Massachusetts' education leaders are working to better align birth through third grade initiatives. Public and private stakeholders have, for the most part, bought into the benefits of investing in early learning opportunities for children, particularly in programs that are not only raising awareness, but also helping to change the life trajectories of children and their families. The state has made progress by expanding access to high-quality pre-K through PEG, maintaining access to full-day kindergarten, and making investments to build the early care and education workforce.

But even though the Bay State has established a Department of Early Education and Care under the umbrella of the Executive Office of Education in order to improve communication and coordination across birth-to-five, K-12, and higher education, there is still a disconnect between the work of the three departments. Multiple years of flat funding and cuts to early education programs have made it difficult to serve more children in high-quality programs. And as in many other states, leaders in Massachusetts leave a lot of discretion to local school districts, which complicates the implementation of a kindergarten entrance assessment, for instance, that is intended to compare incoming student readiness across the state.

The recommendations New America puts forth in this brief can help Massachusetts better support its districts in promoting positive outcomes for children, building strong readers throughout the state using a comprehensive, B-3rd approach:

1. Develop a clearly-communicated plan for building the early education and care workforce.

The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, in partnership with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Higher Education, should revise and develop a multi-year timeline and clear pathways for transition to a minimum bachelor's degree qualification requirement with a specialization in early childhood education for lead teachers in all early care and education settings. The plan should be clearly communicated to ease anxiety around this requirement. Communication must include access points for people at every educational level in the workforce, but must also

explain the importance of the new requirement. In addition, the commonwealth will need to consider how to encourage programs to improve teachers' working conditions and to raise salaries to adequately compensate all teachers who meet the new qualification requirement, to ensure that non-public school programs do not lose their best teachers to school-based pre-K or elementary school classrooms.

2. Expand investment in high-quality, full-day pre-K, particularly for children in high-need communities.

There is a huge demand for access to pre-K. Research is clear that high-quality pre-K can improve school readiness and life outcomes for children. The state legislature should move forward with the proposed pre-K bill that focuses on increasing access to high-quality pre-K for three- and four-year-olds in districts failing to produce high third grade reading proficiency rates across all demographics.

3. Improve children's access to high-quality full-day kindergarten and stay the course for the first through third grades.

High-quality, full-day pre-K needs to be followed up by strong full-day kindergarten and early grade experiences. Varying lengths of day for kindergarten and charging tuition for some full-day programs is exacerbating the achievement gap from an early age. Full-day kindergarten should be funded through the school finance formula at a level equal to or greater than first grade. Once this funding is in place the remaining districts will have an incentive to begin offering full-day kindergarten.

The commonwealth should also deepen its commitment to improving kindergarten. The Quality FDK Grant is a lever to spur meaningful change in the classroom. DESE should hold districts to improving classroom learning environments and instructional practices. The department has a plan in place to encourage other districts to adopt the principles BPS has used to improve its kindergarten programs. The state should fully support this effort by funding technical assistance for districts, professional development for principals, and coaching for teachers.

4. **Eliminate English-only instruction in K–12 and reinstitute a bilingual education model.**

With the growing population of dual language learners in Massachusetts and the robust and comprehensive instruction taking place in Head Start and other community-based organizations with DLL children under five, the commonwealth should remove its English-only policy in K–12. Research suggests that bilingual instruction is more effective than English-only instruction in supporting DLL academic achievement.¹⁰⁸ Proposed House Bill 498 should move forward to allow teachers to use research-based bilingual education models with their students. In addition, comprehensive screenings for DLLs are needed in pre-K or earlier to evaluate student knowledge in both home language(s) and English.

5. **Deepen collaboration between the Department of Early Education and Care and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and have them work together to enact the recommendations from the Early Education to Higher Education Advisory Group to create a new B–3rd teacher certification system, ensuring it includes stackable credentials that lead to licensure while at the same time phasing out the PreK-through-second grade license.** This has the potential to foster greater continuity within the early education and care workforce. A common credential for all educators from birth through second grade will help to create a highly-skilled workforce with the same child development and pedagogical knowledge base.

6. **Require common assessments or allow districts to choose from a short list of approved assessments for students in kindergarten through second grade.** The Department of Early Care and Education’s goal is to move toward a common statewide kindergarten entry assessment. Common, developmentally-appropriate assessments from kindergarten through second grade would allow the state to compare data across districts prior to third grade. Standard assessments would also make it easier for the state to identify any differences in outcomes between districts.

7. **Continue supporting the B–3rd alignment partnerships beyond Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge.** Many Bay State communities have begun important work in providing a more seamless continuum of learning for children. A joint EEC/ESE grant fund could be particularly effective. It could encourage efforts along the full B–3rd continuum, or at least a PreK–3rd continuum. The focus of the current partnerships has generally been on pre-K. The transition from pre-K into kindergarten could continue to be one focus. Another could be better connecting the quality of early learning environments and instruction in kindergarten, first, second, and third grades.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Lessons from Massachusetts are applicable for other states seeking to improve children's B-3rd experiences to help ensure they are on the path to reading well by the end of third grade. For example, the state has set high expectations within its QRIS for the workforce and is working on ways to help teachers in child care centers and family child care attain advanced educational credentials. With its winning RTT-ELC grant came a mechanism, the Birth-through-Third Grade Alignment Grants, to spur school districts and community partners to work together on improving coordination and transitions for families across children's early years. Education officials are following Boston's lead and focusing on improving kindergarten quality by helping other districts strengthen curricula, enrich learning environments, and improve instructional practice.

Massachusetts' third grade reading law does not mirror the laws in many other states. Instead of codifying the need to identify struggling readers and setting a series of interventions and retention requirements, leaders opted to establish a panel of experts and stakeholders to first consider the existing resources and then recommend the best path forward to improving reading outcomes for children. This is a promising approach, but the

work should not stop with the panel. State officials and lawmakers will need to take the important next step of making sure resources are in place to implement the recommendations once they are released.

While some of this work started before Race to the Top K-12 and RTT-ELC, these federal programs certainly provided significant funding boosts and enabled the state to broaden its approach to early education. The question for Bay State leaders, and those in other states as well, is whether they can sustain and expand the work put into place after RTT-ELC funds end in 2016. Many of these initiatives, such as improving the workforce and improving pre-K quality, can support children's literacy, as well as their overall learning and development. Will the new state administration prioritize and support future investments in these efforts? Will local superintendents follow its lead?

A foundation of collaboration at the state and local levels is certainly a strength for Massachusetts. A key step forward is to further strengthen this collaboration and continue building support for a shared birth-through-third grade approach across the state.



LIST OF INTERVIEWS

- **Nicole Blais** — Director of Community Engagement, Holyoke, Chicopee, Springfield Head Start
- **Jocelyn Bowne** — Preschool Expansion Grant Senior Research Specialist, Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care
- **Jamie Buskey** — Jamaica Plain Head Start Director, Action for Boston Community Development
- **Flossy Calderon** — Head Start Program Director, Action for Boston Community Development
- **Cynthia Caporaso** — Project Manager of Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Programs, Springfield Public Schools
- **Lisa Correnti** — Preschool Education Coordinator at Head Start, Action for Boston Community Development
- **Sue Doucette** — Former Early Childhood Coordinator, Pittsfield Public Schools
- **Mary Driscoll** — Principal of Thomas A. Edison K–8 School, Boston Public Schools
- **Marie Enochty** — Program Manager of Early Childhood Education, Boston Public Schools
- **Sally Fuller** — Project Director, The Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation
- **Maura Geary** — Director of Strategic Program Innovation, Regional Employment Board of Hampden County
- **Susan Gosselin** — Director of Literacy, Springfield Public Schools
- **Winifred Hagan** — Interim Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success, Massachusetts Department of Higher Education
- **David Jacobson** — Director, Birth Through Third Grade Learning Hub and Education Development Center
- **Mary Kinsella** — Vice President, Boys and Girls of Dorchester
- **Kelly Kulsrud** — Director of Reading Proficiency, Strategies for Children
- **Shannon Langone** — Program Director of the AmeriCorps Massachusetts Reading Corps, Springfield College
- **Kelly Marion** — Chief Executive Officer, Gladys Allen Brigham Community Center
- **Doug McNally** — Coordinator, Berkshire Readiness Center
- **Laura Mendes** — Supervisor of PreK–3rd Grade, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, Springfield Public Schools
- **Anita Moeller** — Preschool Expansion Grant Director, Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care
- **Erin Morris** — Program Specialist, Parent Child Home Program
- **Carol Nolan** — Director of Policy, Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care
- **Amy O’Leary** — Early Education for All Campaign Director, Strategies for Children
- **Rebecca Pecor** — Jamaica Plain Head Start Education Supervisor, Action for Boston Community Development
- **Cindy Recoulle** — Assistant Vice President of Programs for Quality Assurance, Square One
- **Yvette Rodriguez** — Vice President of Head Start and Children’s Services, Action for Boston Community Development
- **Jason Sachs** — Director of Early Childhood Education, Boston Public Schools

- **Janis Santos** — Executive Director, Holyoke, Chicopee, Springfield Head Start
- **Nina Schlikin** — Director of Curriculum and Instruction: Literacy and Humanities, Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care
- **Sharon Scott-Chandler** — Executive Vice President, Action for Boston Community Development
- **Tracy Sheerin** — Assistant Director, KidZone Inc.
- **Cinnamon Smith** — Administrative Assistant Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Programs, Springfield Public Schools
- **Donna Traynham** — Early Learning Team Lead in the Office of Learning Supports and Early Learning, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- **Karen Vogel** — Community Impact Program Manager, Berkshire United Way
- **Megan Walsh** — Program Coordinator of Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Programs, Springfield Public Schools
- **Courtney Waring** — Director of Education, Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art
- **Tom Weber** — Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care
- **Jessica Zerbato** — Director of Early Childhood Education, Gladys Allen Brigham Community Center

NOTES

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