

## Early Childhood Literacy Recommendations



**45.2%**

of West Michigan 3rd graders are capable of reading at grade level.



down 2.6% from 2021

### Reason for Action

Michigan's early literacy outcomes are among the weakest in the nation. Ranking 44th in 2024 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Assessment, the state faces an urgent challenge with serious implications for children's success and Michigan's long-term economic competitiveness.

Michigan has made meaningful investments in early literacy, including stronger teacher preparation and expanded use of evidence-based practices such as structured literacy, high-quality instructional materials, and ongoing professional learning. These efforts are underway and require continued fidelity to deliver results.

Experience from other states shows, however, that improvement depends on more than time and funding alone. Michigan must strengthen coherence across its Pre-K through early elementary strategy to close remaining gaps and accelerate improvement.

**38.9%**

of Michigan 3rd graders are capable of reading at grade level.



down 2.7% from 2021

## 01 Systems Level Recommendations

- ✓ **Reinstate the third-grade literacy-based promotion requirement**  
Students who are not reading proficiently by third grade face significantly higher risks of long-term academic failure and non-completion; reinstating the third grade literacy-based promotion requirement, with limited exemptions, reflects a proven strategy used in Mississippi's successful literacy reforms and ensures early, targeted intervention at this critical developmental milestone before students advance.
- ✓ **Reinstate the A-F school rating system**  
Restoring clear and consistent accountability measures is essential to improving schools and rebuilding public trust in Michigan's education system. An A-F school rating system—successfully used in other states—provides families, educators, and policymakers with straightforward, transparent information about school performance that supports informed decision-making and continuous improvement.
- ✓ **Attract and Retain Exceptional Education Leaders at the Michigan Department of Education (MDE)**  
This policy would enable highly qualified educators to serve in temporary or permanent roles at the state level, expanding their impact beyond individual classrooms and building the stability and expertise within MDE needed to sustain and scale statewide early literacy improvement efforts.

## 02 Address Chronic Absenteeism

- ✓ Chronic absenteeism, commonly defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year for any reason, disrupts learning and directly undermines literacy development, particularly in the early grades. Other states have successfully reduced chronic absenteeism through coordinated strategies such as statewide attendance campaigns, improved data-sharing systems, and targeted family engagement; adopting similar approaches in Michigan would help districts identify barriers, improve attendance, and strengthen early learning outcomes.

## 03 Pre-K Literacy Recommendations

### ✓ Implement a Statewide Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

Adopting a universal kindergarten entry assessment aligns Michigan with best practices used in other states and provides consistent data on children’s readiness in literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional development. This shared measure enables early identification of gaps, strengthens alignment across early learning and K–12 systems, and supports improved early learning outcomes statewide.

### ✓ Expand Reach Out and Read Statewide

The Reach Out and Read program is a proven, evidence-based approach that integrates books and literacy guidance into well-child visits to strengthen early language development and ensure children are prepared for school success. State resources should be reallocated from similar programs without demonstrated results to support the statewide expansion of this effective model.

### ✓ Invest in competitive compensation for the childcare workforce

Low wages in the childcare sector drive high turnover and undermine the quality and availability of care. Investing in competitive compensation that reflects the true cost of care has been proven by demonstration projects led by ECIC and TalentFirst to enable providers to attract and retain qualified staff, stabilize the workforce, expand childcare capacity, and improve instructional quality and child outcomes.

## 04 K-3 Literacy Recommendations

### ✓ Invest in High Quality Curriculum and Other Resources

Allowing greater flexibility in the use of the 35m Tier 1 Early Literacy Materials fund enables districts to invest in high-quality, evidence-based resources they are already using successfully or are prepared to adopt. Promoting consistent use of proven programs reduces fragmentation, strengthens implementation, and maximizes the impact of state literacy investments.

### ✓ Align Educator Preparation and Professional Development to the Science of Reading

Creating a coherent system that aligns pre-service preparation with sustained, high-quality professional development equips educators—especially in the early grades—with consistent, research-based literacy practices. Ensuring access to LETRS training in both teacher preparation programs and in-service professional development, along with time for completion and support from literacy coaches, strengthens instructional quality and improves early reading outcomes statewide. Maintaining investments in Grow Your Own programs, future educator stipends and fellowships, and mentor teacher supports further strengthens the educator pipeline, with teaching colleges reporting increased enrollment and more students pursuing careers in education as a result.

## Literacy Leadership Awards

TalentFirst annually recognizes West Michigan schools that demonstrate excellence in early literacy by highlighting those that achieve strong M-STEP ELA performance or growth while outperforming peer schools with similar economic profiles. Recognized schools exemplify best practices by implementing GELN’s Literacy Essentials, providing ongoing professional learning aligned with the science of reading, employing dedicated literacy coaches, using high-quality curricula with systematic phonics instruction, leveraging formative assessment data to guide instruction, and maintaining comprehensive, district-aligned school improvement plans focused on early literacy.

### Award Recipients:

1. Meadow Ridge, Rockford (2024)
2. Washington Street Elementary, Otsego (2024)
3. Riverview Elementary, Big Rapids (2024)
4. Lincoln Heights Elementary, Greenville (2024)
5. Dutton Elementary, Caledonia (2024)
6. Shettler Elementary, Fruitport (2025)
7. Grandville Central Elementary, Grandville (2025)
8. Cross Creek Charter Academy, Byron Center (2025)
9. Glenwood Elementary, Kentwood (2025)
10. Walnut Hills Elementary, Greenville (2025)
11. Vanderbilt Charter Academy, Holland (2025)