Early Literacy Matters

State-by-State Policy Implementation Report

Explore Massachusetts’s adoption and implementation of the 18 Early Literacy Fundamental Principles.
## Early Literacy Policy Implementation Rubric

Comprehensive Early Literacy Policy establishes support and intensive reading interventions for all K–3 students to ensure they read on grade level by the end of 3rd grade. The policy also requires 3rd grade students to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion to 4th grade. For students severely below grade level and who do not qualify for a good cause exemption, retention provides struggling readers the additional time and intensive interventions they need to catch up with their peers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FULL IMPLEMENTATION</th>
<th>The fundamental principle is adopted in policy, and there is evidence of full implementation.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>ABOVE &amp; BEYOND BADGE:</strong> This badge recognizes efforts that exceed full implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION</td>
<td>The fundamental principle is adopted in policy, but there is limited evidence of implementation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION</td>
<td>The fundamental principle is adopted in policy with a future date for implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED</td>
<td>The fundamental principle is not adopted in policy, does not meet minimum implementation requirements or is grant-based and not sustainable.</td>
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The purpose of this document is to provide an analysis of states’ implementation of K–3 reading policies aligned to ExcelinEd’s fundamental principles of an early literacy policy. It builds on an analysis of states’ adoption of statutes and regulations establishing requirements for each component of the four fundamental principle areas, which are:

1. Supports for Teachers & Policy
2. Assessment & Parent Notification
3. Instruction & Intervention
4. Retention & Intensive Intervention

This report summarizes evidence of Massachusetts’s early literacy policy implementation using an implementation rubric designed to gauge state progress toward full implementation of early literacy policies. Each of the fundamental principles is addressed in a separate table.

**Early Literacy Policy Implementation Rubric**

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Science of Reading (SOR) Training

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Massachusetts DOES offer training to K–3 educators and administrators that is aligned with science of reading. ([Mass. DESE, Mass Literacy: Open Access Professional Learning (OAPL)](Mass. DESE, Mass Literacy: Open Access Professional Learning (OAPL))

- Massachusetts DOES NOT require educators and administrators to participate in this professional learning. ([Mass. DESE, Mass Literacy: Open Access Professional Learning (OAPL)](Mass. DESE, Mass Literacy: Open Access Professional Learning (OAPL))

RESOURCES


CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Massachusetts should require state-adopted science of reading training be completed by all K–3 teachers and administrators.
Literacy Coaches

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Massachusetts DOES NOT address literacy coaches in policy.

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Massachusetts should ensure that literacy coaches are addressed in policy and a literacy coach that is trained in the science of reading is assigned to each elementary school to provide job-embedded training and coaching to K–3 teachers.
Educator Preparation Program (EPP) Alignment

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION

Full implementation of this principle requires the following: EPP-required coursework (elementary, early childhood and special education) is aligned to the science of reading and prohibits the use of course materials that include three-cueing. Coursework includes evidence-based literacy instruction, how to administer reading assessments and how to identify students with reading difficulties, such as dyslexia.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

• Massachusetts HAS established a goal that all early childhood, elementary and moderate disabilities teacher candidates in the state will be prepared in evidence-based early literacy by the 2024–2025 school year. (Mass. DESE, Early Literacy in Educator Preparation)

• Massachusetts IS working to develop program approval criteria for EPPs focused on evidence-based early literacy instruction that is aligned to the state’s Mass Literacy initiative.

• Massachusetts WILL require EPP coursework to include how to administer reading assessments and how to identify reading deficiencies, per the Early Literacy Criteria draft language.
IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE (CONTINUED)

• Through the spring of 2024, Massachusetts IS offering formative feedback reviews for EPPs that would like to participate. This includes comprehensive feedback on programmatic alignment to new expectations for early literacy instruction. ([Mass. DESE](https://www.mass.edu/dese/), Formative Feedback Reviews for Early Literacy Programs)

• By the 2024–2025 school year, Massachusetts WILL have full implementation of the Early Literacy Program Criteria and will launch the revised guidelines for program approval and educator preparation program review process. ([Mass. DESE](https://www.mass.edu/dese/), Formative Feedback Reviews for Early Literacy Programs)

• Massachusetts HAS created guidance for educators to support implementation of screeners, including an informational webinar for faculty of EPPs to prepare teacher candidates. ([Mass. DESE](https://www.mass.edu/dese/), Early Literacy in Educator Preparation)

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

• Massachusetts should establish a policy that would prohibit the use of course materials in EPP coursework that includes three-cueing.
**IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL**

**PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION**

Elementary education candidates must take an assessment that is aligned to the science of reading, but the results may not impact licensure.

**EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE**

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Massachusetts DOES require elementary education candidates to pass a reading assessment to obtain teacher licensure: Foundations of Reading, which IS ALIGNED to the science of reading; OR Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure Reading Specialist, which is only PARTIALLY aligned to the science of reading. ([NCTQ, Massachusetts Summary 2023; NCTQ, False Assurances: Many states’ licensure tests don’t signal whether elementary teachers understand reading instruction (Nov. 2023)](https://www.nctq.org/blog/False-Assurances-Many-states-licensure-tests-don-t-signal-whether-elementary-teachers-understand-reading-instruction)"

**NOTEWORTHY**

The following aspects of the state’s work are particularly noteworthy:

- In 2020, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approved an amendment to the Regulations for Educator Licensure and Preparation Program Approval that created a pilot program to evaluate alternative methods of assessment for educator licensure. The pilot program will continue through June 30, 2025. ([Mass DESE, Pilot of Alternative Assessments to the MTEL](https://www2.dor.state.ma.us/Main/MassDESE/Reports/AlternativeAssessmentPilotProgram2019-2020.pdf))

**CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY**

- Massachusetts should ensure elementary teacher candidates are required to pass a licensure test aligned to the science of reading.
Funding for Literacy Efforts

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

Funding is dedicated to some but not all early literacy fundamental principles and may be temporary or grant based.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Massachusetts DOES provide direct funding specifically to support state and/or local implementation of early literacy fundamental principles. These include:
  - Funding for high-quality instructional materials
  - Funding through the Evidence-Based Early Literacy Continuation Grant, which may be used for stipends, substitutes, DESE-approved literacy consultants, evidence-based materials and screeners
  - Funding for universal screening assessments

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Massachusetts should determine the adequate funding level to ensure implementation of the fundamental principles are fully funded.
Universal Reading Screener

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

States require districts to adopt a universal reading screener to be administered three times per year to identify students at risk for reading failure.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

• Massachusetts DOES require schools to administer a reading screener to K–3 students at least twice per school year. (Mass. DESE, Early Literacy Universal Screening Assessments)

• Massachusetts DOES require schools to use an early literacy screening instrument that has been approved by the DESE and comports with the Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines and principles of anti-bias. (Mass. DESE, Early Literacy Universal Screening Assessments)

RESOURCES

• Mass. DESE, Guidance – Sample Family Letters

• Screening Assessments At-A-Glance Guide

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

• Massachusetts should expand policy to require schools to administer the universal reading screener to K–3 students three times per year.
The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Massachusetts HAS identified early literacy universal screeners that comport with the Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines. However, not all screeners assess the following skills: phonological and phonemic awareness, sound-symbol recognition, alphabet knowledge, decoding, rapid naming, encoding and oral reading fluency. (Mass. DESE, Early Literacy Universal Screening Assessments)

- Massachusetts HAS issued guidelines to districts to provide information on developing screening procedures for students to identify students with characteristics of dyslexia. (Mass. DESE, Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines)

- Massachusetts DOES encourage schools to assess students in K-3 multiple times per year for characteristics of dyslexia through the state’s Dyslexia Guidelines, but policy does not require this. (See also 603 CMR 28.03(1)(f) Early Literacy Screening)

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Massachusetts should approve a screener for characteristics of dyslexia that assess all of the following skills, as developmentally appropriate: phonological and phonemic awareness, sound-symbol recognition, alphabet knowledge, decoding, rapid naming, encoding and oral reading fluency.

- Massachusetts should require the screener to be, at minimum, administered to all students at the end of kindergarten and the beginning of 1st and 2nd grade.
Parental Notification

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

States require parental notification of students identified with reading difficulties based on the state-approved universal reading screener and/or dyslexia screener results. Timeline and frequency of parental notification may vary.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Massachusetts DOES require schools to notify parents of the results of students identified with reading difficulties within 30 school days. (Mass. DESE, Early Literacy Universal Screening Assessments)

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Massachusetts should expand policy to require administration of the universal reading screener three times per year in Kindergarten–3rd grade. This could strengthen Massachusetts’ policy of parental notification by providing parents with more information on their child’s reading difficulties.
District Adoption of High-Quality Instructional Materials

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

The state provides guidance and resources to assist districts in the identification and selection of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) aligned to the science of reading and state standards.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Massachusetts DOES provide guidance and resources to support the identification and selection of HQIM aligned to science of reading and state standards. ([Mass. DESE, Curriculum Matters: Instructional Materials and Professional Development](#))

- Massachusetts DOES encourage districts to use IMplement MA, a four-phase process to implement new high-quality instructional materials. ([Mass. DESE, IMplement MA Process](#))

RESOURCES

- [Mass. DESE, CURATE](#)
- [Mass. DESE, Multi-Tiered System of Support](#)

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Massachusetts should expand policy to require school districts to adopt high-quality instructional materials aligned to science of reading and state standards from a vetted and approved list.

- Massachusetts should require districts to post their adopted materials on the district website.
IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

• Massachusetts HAS NOT adopted a policy that bans three-cueing instructional materials.

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

• Massachusetts should adopt a policy, clearly in statute or regulation, that prohibits the use of three-cueing instructional practices and materials as part of their comprehensive literacy policy.
Individual Reading Plans

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

• Massachusetts DOES NOT have a policy relating to individual reading plans.

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

• Massachusetts should require schools to develop and implement individual reading plans for students who are identified as having a reading deficiency within 30 days of receiving screening results.

• Massachusetts should also establish a process to monitor the implementation of the individual reading plans and a timeline for notifying parents of the development of the plan.
Regularly Monitor Student Progress

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

The state requires schools to monitor students’ progress within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). Monitoring can take many forms (i.e., observations, screeners, assessments and student work).

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Massachusetts DOES recommend that schools monitor student progress within a multi-tiered system of supports. ([Mass. DESE, Tiered Instruction within the MTSS Model](#))
- Massachusetts DOES provide guidance on different tools that may be used for monitoring. ([Mass. DESE, Tiered Instruction within the MTSS Model](#))
- Massachusetts DOES require educators to use data to inform tiered instruction within the MTSS model. ([Mass. DESE, Tiered Instruction within the MTSS Model](#))

RESOURCES

- [Mass. DESE, Multi-Tiered System of Support](#)

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Massachusetts should expand policy to require administration of the universal reading screener three times per year in Kindergarten–3rd grade. The data that is produced from these screeners will then be effective in informing instruction and interventions as needed and in a timely manner.
- Massachusetts should expand policy to require that schools monitor students’ progress within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS).
Evidence-Based Interventions

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

• Massachusetts DOES provide guidance on evidence-based interventions. (Mass. DESE, Tiered Instruction within the MTSS Model)

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

• Massachusetts should require school districts to adopt interventions that are grounded in the science of reading that are from a vetted and approved list.
• Massachusetts should ensure that guidance to districts on interventions include interventions that occur before, during or after school.
IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Massachusetts DOES NOT provide for summer reading camps for rising 1st–4th grade students at risk of reading failure to remediate learning loss and/or build reading skills.

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Massachusetts should require districts to offer summer reading camps to rising 1st–4th graders at risk of reading failure to remediate learning loss and/or build reading skills.
- As part of the summer reading camps, the state should require all staff to be trained in the science of reading.
IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Massachusetts DOES provide online resources to parents to support reading at home.

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Massachusetts should require schools to provide read-at-home plans to parents as soon as a student is identified with a reading deficiency.
- The read-at-home plans that are created should target students’ needs based on data and must be aligned with the science of reading.
IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

• Massachusetts DOES NOT have a policy requiring 3rd grade students to be retained when they are unable to demonstrate sufficient reading skills on the state test-based options provided.

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

• Massachusetts should strengthen policy to require that students who are unable to demonstrate sufficient reading skills on the 3rd grade state test-based options be retained.
Multiple Options for Promotion

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

• Massachusetts DOES NOT have a retention policy and does not offer at least three pathways for promotion to 4th grade.

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

• In establishing a retention policy, Massachusetts should offer at least three pathways to promotion to 4th grade, including achieving a predetermined level on the state reading assessment, passing an alternative assessment or retest or successfully demonstrating sufficient 3rd grade reading skills through a portfolio of student work.
Good Cause Exemptions for Some Students

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Massachusetts DOES NOT have a retention policy and does not allow specific good cause exemptions for promotion to 4th grade.

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- In establishing a retention policy, Massachusetts should allow specific good cause exemptions for promotion to 4th grade that recognize the special needs of some students with disabilities, English language learners and students who were previously retained.

- Massachusetts should provide that when a student is allowed to be promoted with a good cause exemption, intensive interventions should continue.