



## POLICY LEVERS TO PROMOTE EARLY LITERACY IN ESSA STATE AND LOCAL PLANS

In 2015, one-third of the nation's fourth graders were reading at a level of proficient or better on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).<sup>1</sup> Research shows that these gaps start early, with children as young as 18 months falling behind in their knowledge of vocabulary and other early literacy skills.<sup>2</sup> Over the earliest years, these gaps add up for low-income children and other children at risk of falling behind, as they enter kindergarten as much as 14 months behind their classmates in pre-literacy and language skills.<sup>3</sup> ESSA state and local plans provide an important opportunity to support policies and practices that can help close these early gaps in literacy.

As states develop their ESSA plans, they will also provide guidance and technical assistance to districts. Local education agencies (LEAs) will also develop plans for implementation, and each of these opportunities can be leveraged in support of improved early literacy outcomes by including the following early literacy priorities in ESSA state plans:

- **Statewide Accountability Systems:** Include a long-term goal for literacy proficiency that includes aligned literacy measures for kindergarten through second grade as part of the state accountability system. Adopt chronic absence, starting in kindergarten as a measure of accountability that helps to identify schools in need of improvement.<sup>4</sup>
- **State/Local Report Cards:** Use these to create public awareness and accountability for school readiness, struggling readers and chronic absence.
  - Adopt a kindergarten entrance assessment/profile, kindergarten readiness indicators or other measures (including participation in high-quality, full day early childhood programs) to identify literacy gaps to be used before third-grade assessments as a diagnostic tool to inform instruction and for use as part of diagnostic reviews of schools.
  - Include in state/local report cards indicators of reading progress for children in pre-kindergarten through third grade in order to identify struggling readers in kindergarten, first and second grades so that interventions can be provided to students and as part of diagnostic review of school needs.
  - Report on chronic absenteeism rates of children, starting in kindergarten by grade as well as for key subpopulations including by ethnicity and special education status.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading\\_math\\_2015/#reading/acl?grade=4](http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2015/#reading/acl?grade=4)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.elcndm.org/Knowledge\\_Center/reports/Child\\_Trends-2009\\_07\\_10\\_FR\\_DisparitiesEL.pdf](http://www.elcndm.org/Knowledge_Center/reports/Child_Trends-2009_07_10_FR_DisparitiesEL.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/early-learning/matter-equity-preschool-america.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The GLR Campaign recommends chronic absence as both accountability system indicator and for state and local report cards; FEE recommends chronic absence as a measure for report cards.

- **Challenging Academic Standards:** Ensure that academic content standards that begin in kindergarten are aligned with the state early learning standards and that there is appropriate professional development and other supports to implement the standards through developmentally appropriate practice.
- **Support Appropriate Academic Assessments:** Disseminate research on best practices for formative assessments that cross pre-K to third grade that reflect appropriate development and cultural competency and are valid and reliable for all students.
- **Family Engagement:** Create materials in all required languages for parents to understand information on reading assessments and develop home-based activities to support teaching and learning goals using Title I funds for parent engagement.
- **LEARN Act:** Ensure that the state applies for and uses the Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) grant program to support state and local activities for children birth to third grade to create early literacy materials, provide professional development for teachers, and other literacy supports to parents, providers, schools and other staff working with young children.
- **Language Instruction for English Learners:** Ensure that English Language learners have access to high-quality early literacy supports in early childhood and through pre-kindergarten to third grade through Title III funding.
- **Community Partnerships:** Work with community partners to provide books and other materials to families, caregivers and other community members. Encourage community partners to use data on chronic absence to identify where extra supports, health services, dental care, transportation, etc., might be needed to ensure students can get to school.
- **Innovative Approaches to Language and Literacy:** Support and encourage partnerships at the local level between early childhood providers, libraries, schools and community providers to share materials and resources to promote literacy, such as joint professional development, assessments, and effective parent engagement strategies as part of coordination activities in Title I.
- **Preparing Teachers and Other School Leaders:** Provide professional development and coaching to both school- and community-based teachers that create high-quality, developmentally appropriate (including supports for social-emotional development) teacher-child interactions that build early language and literacy skills.
- **Preparing Teachers and Other School Leaders:** Develop professional development and guidance for teachers and school leaders specifically focused on early literacy, including state-level meetings and conferences funded with Title II funds.
- **Expanded Learning Time:** Support summer learning and limit learning loss through Title I funds to address early literacy gaps for all children from birth through third grade.
- **Support for Low-Performing Schools:** Include summer learning programs as part of recommended interventions for schools identified for comprehensive or targeted supports.
- **Student Support and Academic Enrichment:** Require districts to demonstrate how they are using 21st Century Learning Centers and the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants to support early literacy activities.