

# Arizona State Board of Education

## K-3 Literacy Ad Hoc Committee

### Early Literacy and Move on When Reading Recommendations

The Arizona State Board of Education oversees the implementation of early literacy policy in Arizona and has adopted the goals of the Arizona Education Progress Meter led by Expect More Arizona and the Center for the Future of Arizona.

The Arizona Education Progress Meter focuses on an increase in reading proficiency by Arizona's third grade students to 72% proficient or higher by 2030, which puts Arizona on track to meet Arizona Department of Education's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan outcomes: 1) closing the proficiency gaps by 50% by 2027 and 2) reaching a goal of at least 90% proficiency for all sub-groups by 2039.

Through the partnership with Read on Arizona, the State Board of Education is working to address school readiness and third-grade reading goals reflected in the Arizona Education Progress Meter and the ESSA long-term goals. This is also being augmented by the K-3 Quality Initiative, which aims to clarify and streamline current work done and provide a road map for how K-3 quality can be improved. By addressing these areas, the early part of the education pipeline is strengthened so Arizona reaches its overall Achieve 60 attainment goal.

Since 2015, third grade proficiency rates on the statewide AzMerit assessment have seen small increases.

As of spring 2018, 44% of Arizona's third grade students scored proficient or higher in reading and this is only an increase of four percentage points in four years. Following this trend, if systems and policies remain stagnant in Arizona, third grade students will not meet the 2030 goal of 72% proficiency, as the state would need to see an increase of 22% in the next 12 years. With the current trend of increasing proficiency by about 1% per year, Arizona third grade students need to see average annual increases in proficiency by 2.3% to meet the 2030 goal.

In order to succeed in these necessary and highly ambitious goals by the deadlines provided, the State Board of Education, through the appointed K-3 Literacy Ad Hoc Committee, has provided recommendations on areas of improvement to support a comprehensive early literacy system that will lead to higher reading proficiency rates.

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### Early Literacy and Move on When Reading Recommendations

#### Issue 1:

*The current system does not have standardized literacy assessments across grades K-3, preventing statewide monitoring of data, identification of trends and comparison of results.*

*In school year 2019-2020, Arizona will move to a Menu of Assessments for grades 3-8. With third grade students taking different assessments, a standard of comparison is not valid and prevents setting a single cut score to identify students at risk of retention. The prospect of setting multiple cut scores opens the MOWR program to confusion and contention. Furthermore, it will hamper the state's ability to determine if progress is being made toward the goal of 72% by 2030.*

#### Recommendations:

1. Enhance the statewide comprehensive K-3 assessment system, which currently includes universal screeners, benchmarks, diagnostic assessments and progress monitoring tools. This enhanced system needs to be developmentally appropriate, relevant to students' learning, and include:

- A common statewide entry level kindergarten baseline universal screener
- A statewide K-2 benchmark tool to measure progress towards third grade reading
- A common statewide third grade summative reading assessment which could be administered multiple time during third grade

Such a system would:

- Yield baseline and progress data for all K-3 students so as to facilitate early identification, intervention and the targeting of additional resources. This will also provide comparable information to stakeholders looking to assess the effectiveness and progress of the state program.
- Reduce the administrative burden on districts and schools of entering data into the ADE portal and facilitate easy identification of which interventions provide the best outcomes to students.

2. Amend language in MOWR policy and require all LEAs and Charters to report literacy plans and early literacy data every year.

By requiring all LEAs and Charters to submit literacy plans and early literacy data every year, it allows for the state to identify effective practices, compare year-to-year statewide results in relation to progress towards the goals and report results to all schools.

3. Clarify language in MOWR guidance that a student can be retained at the end third grade no more than once.

4. Revise language in MOWR policy to increase the English Language Learner exemption to three years from two years.

#### Issue 2:

*The current cut score for the AzMERIT does not accurately capture the number of students who are far below proficiency and does not provide those students access to interventions triggered by the MOWR policy. Spring AzMERIT results indicated that 56% of third graders are below proficient, yet only 2% of third graders were identified as at risk of retention.*

#### Recommendation:

It is recommended that the cut score be raised in association with the recommendations above. Acknowledging the current climate of MOWR and Menu of Assessments, discussions on raising the cut score cannot occur until the direction of the third-grade reading assessment, in any form, is determined. The K-3 Literacy Ad Hoc Committee plans on submitting an addendum to the State Board of Education on these recommendations with a road map for raising cut scores.

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#### Issue 3:

*The Department of Education currently has 1.5 FTE and \$500,000 to administer the MOWR program and provide support to 1255 schools. This level of funding provides for compliance review of 468 literacy plans, K-3 professional development training and a minimal level of expert counsel for the state.*

#### Recommendation:

**Additional administrative funds to ADE to provide more robust state supports and technical assistance based on early literacy data and prioritized by need.**

Such support could include:

- Reading coaches and specialists to provide on-site professional development
- Enhancements to the state data portal system to allow for analysis of outcomes and strategies in order to identify effective practices across various student populations
- Build online resources to enable users to research effective practices in early literacy, while being able to connect and plan with other schools within Arizona
- Identify and monitor the bottom 10% of schools with the lowest 3rd grade reading proficiency rates and establish minimum literacy plan enhancements to increase student outcomes

#### Issue 4:

*There are a high number of students not meeting 3rd grade reading proficiency. Current MOWR and Early Literacy Grant funds are not adequate to serve the 56% of students falling below proficiency.*

#### Recommendation

**Renew and redirect Early Literacy Program funding to areas of greatest need. Additional funding is also needed for schools that serve a greater proportion of K-3 students far below proficiency and/or identified at risk.**

Such funding could:

- Support additional reading specialists, more intensive intervention, before and after school tutoring, summer school, etc.