



DEVELOP A ROAD MAP FOR EARLY LITERACY

"We have enormous expectations of community schools that don't have enough resources to meet the needs of kids."

-Brenda, Jackson

THE ROAD AHEAD

To help kids become stronger readers, Michigan must:



Make sure all children can read by third grade, regardless of race, place or family income.



Create a prenatal-to-grade-three literacy initiative.



Engage parents in their children's reading success.



TIME FOR A TUNE-UP

To address the high percentage of Michigan students who are reading below grade level in third grade, the state adopted a Read by Grade Three law that was intended to increase early interventions for students falling behind in reading, while allowing for the retention of students who remain behind at the end of third grade. The foundation for literacy is set before kindergarten, and to date, state investments in reading and family supports—beginning prenatally and continuing through third grade—have not been sufficient. Michigan must put more resources toward literacy if the state is to meet its goal of all children reading by third grade.



ABOUT THE OWNER'S MANUAL FOR MICHIGAN

We all agree Michigan needs a major tune-up. And like the real vehicles we all depend on, it takes a lot of components and tools to make our state go. Without good jobs and training, reliable healthcare, quality education, strong families, and a safe environment, our state can't run properly. That's why we've created a clear and comprehensive plan to help lawmakers on the road ahead—the Owner's Manual for Michigan.

REPAIRING THE PROBLEM:



HOW TO IMPROVE LITERACY IN MICHIGAN

- 1. Focus resources on school districts with the greatest disparities for children of color and those in low-income neighborhoods.** The ability of young children to read cannot be isolated from the circumstances of their births and early years, including access to prenatal and other healthcare services, adequate nutrition, parental literacy, family economic stress, and the quality of early education and child care. Among the resources needed are home visiting programs; the early identification of delays and disabilities (*Early On*); high-quality child care; voluntary preschool for all children from families with low and moderate incomes; and investments in teachers, including professional development and additional literacy coaches to improve reading instruction.
- 2. Create a prenatal-to-third-grade reading initiative.** The brain science is clear—literacy and language gaps begin in the earliest years of life when the very architecture of the brain is being created. Isolated reforms that do not create a continuum of learning—from the prenatal period through third grade—are unlikely to succeed, especially for children with the highest needs. Michigan needs a prenatal-to-third-grade reading initiative that draws on the resources of multiple state departments and is two-generational—providing needed supports to both children and their parents.
- 3. Increase parental involvement and engagement.** Parents are critical partners in efforts to improve reading by third grade, and they must be given adequate information and resources to participate effectively. The Read by Grade Three law provides a range of waivers to grade retention. The state should establish clear procedures to ensure that parents are informed about their options under the law and given the resources needed to request waivers.

SHARING THE ROAD

Equity is of utmost importance when it comes to building a better Michigan. Public policies that have limited employment and housing options for many families of color have contributed to the literacy gap, and efforts to improve third-grade reading must address these disparities. More than 8 of every 10 African American students and two-thirds of Latinx students in Michigan are not proficient in English/Language Arts by the end of third grade. The stakes of failing to read at grade level by third grade have risen as the state prepares to implement the Read by Grade Three law in 2020—a law that could exacerbate disparities if Michigan fails to provide the direction, leadership and funding needed to address the root causes of the literacy gap.



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