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**SUPPORTING OUR YOUNGEST  
READERS: LA READS**

**Louisiana's Early Literacy Commission  
Report Addendum**

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January 2021

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The Louisiana Department of Education worked with the Commission's co-chairs to provide resources and presentations for Commission meetings. Every Commission meeting was open to the public and also available as a livestream. The video link and meeting agenda were posted according to the state's open meetings law. Archived video links, agendas, and materials are publicly available on [www.LouisianaBelieves.com](http://www.LouisianaBelieves.com).



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## SUPPORTING OUR YOUNGEST READERS: LA READS COMMISSION REPORT ADDENDUM JANUARY 2021

### The Commission stands by its initial goals:

- ✓ Commit \$15 million in annual funding to early literacy.
- ✓ Every teacher uses a high-quality curriculum to teach students the foundations of reading and language and literacy.
- ✓ Every student who struggles to read receives timely research-based literacy interventions.
- ✓ Every school has a culture in which all teachers are responsible for and equipped to deliver effective literacy instruction.
- ✓ Every school leader maximizes the use of time and personnel through scheduling and collaborative planning.
- ✓ Every teacher effectively uses evidenced-based practices to meet the literacy needs of all students.
- ✓ Every educator preparation program emphasizes evidence-based literacy practices.
- ✓ Every school system implements a comprehensive literacy assessment plan that includes valid and reliable assessment tools used for different purposes at different times during the school year.
- ✓ Every teacher uses literacy assessment data to monitor students' progress and inform instruction.
- ✓ Every school community expands opportunities for parents and families to be engaged in their children's literacy development.

In order to reach these goals, Louisiana needs to make a strong commitment in 2021. By investing \$15 million this year, in 2021-2022 Louisiana can increase the number of literacy coordinators from 2 to 25, an increase of 1250% over 2020, and also support school systems and schools as they implement these recommendations, including writing literacy plans and providing professional development in the foundations of reading, high quality teacher-student interactions and literacy coaching. School-level literacy coaches and state-level literacy coordinators will also become trainers of trainings in order to build capacity.

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## EARLY LITERACY: A LOUISIANA PRIORITY

**The Early Literacy Commission believes that by the end of third grade, all Louisiana students should be proficient ("Mastery" level) in reading.**

In January 2020, the Early Literacy Commission made a series of recommendations in the [Supporting Our Youngest Readers: LA Reads](#) report to ensure that all students become proficient readers. The state made an initial appropriation during the 2020 legislative session of \$2 million to increase support in early literacy. While that investment is a good start, Louisiana must do more.

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## CURRENT STATE: AN UPDATE

Louisiana Law ([R.S. 17:182](#)) and a policy established by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) require the administration of a literacy screener not later than thirty days after the beginning of each school year in the early elementary grades. The literacy screener is a brief assessment of a particular skill or ability that is typically predictive of a later outcome.

The [Supporting Our Youngest Readers: LA Reads report](#) provided an alarming picture of early literacy in Louisiana. The report noted that findings over the three prior school years showed that scores had dropped at each grade level. For example, on average across all four grade levels K-3, the percentage of children scoring "On or Above Benchmark" decreased from 59.5 in 2017, to 57.2 in 2018, to 51.5 in 2019. This means fewer children were reading on grade level and more children were identified as "At-Risk" for reading failure each year. Also, [Fall 2019 Reading Report](#) data showed that only 43.2% of kindergarten students scored "On or Above Benchmark." Additionally, only 54.2% of first graders, 55.8% of second graders, and 52.8% of third graders scored at this same level. As seen in the [Fall 2020 Reading Report](#), data collected in 2020-2021 continue to emphasize the need for increased early literacy support.

### **The Commission stands by its initial recommendation for an annual investment of \$15 million in early literacy.**

Louisiana's students are as smart and capable as any in America, but young learners and school age students must be provided resources and opportunities to develop reading and writing skills that will enable them to be successful in school from the beginning.

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## EARLY PROGRESS

Since the Commission's initial report, promising steps have been made.

### ✓ Preliminary investment.

The [Supporting Our Youngest Readers: LA Reads report](#) prompted conversations that led to \$2 million in new state funding from the Louisiana legislature in 2020. This investment was a good start, but annual, and larger, investment is needed to realize the vision of literacy as set forth in the report.

### ✓ K-2 Pilots.

One of the ELC's recommendations is to improve K-2 literacy instruction through state-level literacy coordinators and school-based literacy coaches. The Department is acting on this recommendation and developing a comprehensive K-2 Literacy Coaching Model. In 2020-2021 the Department is developing, implementing, and analyzing data from the K-2 Literacy Coaching Pilot. The goals for 2020-2021 are to define a comprehensive scope of training; develop metrics for program implementation; and develop standard protocols for data analysis, coaching schedules, observations and feedback, professional learning, and program evaluation.

During 2020-2021 two state-level literacy coordinators (contractual) are supporting 2-3 school systems and leading a cohort of 6 school-level literacy coaches. Literacy coordinators are supporting literacy coaches to provide high-quality professional development around effective literacy practices and the foundations of reading; provide feedback, engage in one-on-one coaching, and model best practices; identify where high-quality curricula built-in supports are not being maximized; model and teach new quality literacy intervention activities; and coach teachers on using high-quality, evidence-based assessments to determine the most effective interventions required. Twelve school-level literacy coaches (school system employees) are providing direct support to K-2 teachers via observations, feedback, professional development, and data analysis. Every school-level coach is highly trained in early literacy development, effective coaching techniques, high quality curriculum, and quality interactions.

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## BUILDING ON PROGRESS

✓ **K-2 Pilots.** The long-term goal for the 2024-2025 school year is to have full-scale implementation of the K-2 Literacy Coaching Model. In full-scale implementation there is a school-level coach in every CIR and UIR school to support K-2 reading teachers.

✓ **K-2 Accountability.** In the [Supporting Our Youngest Readers: LA Reads report](#), the Commission recommended that Louisiana build a clear accountability system for K-2 grades that defines excellence in each grade and incentivizes progress and rewards achievement. Louisiana has a long history of accountability aligned to the academic focus on grades 3-12 and has recently expanded accountability to publicly-funded early childhood programs. However, Louisiana currently lacks measures to reflect the success of grades K to 2. The following are the goals of K-2 Accountability System development:

- › Design a K-2 accountability system aligned to Department's academic strategy and state standards that bridges the gap between ECE and 3-12 accountability;
- › Pilot, refine, and scale K-2 accountability to reach full implementation by no later than 2022-2023, with ratings with stakes attached released no later than Fall 2023; and
- › Design and implement an improvement strategy aligned to ratings that drives literacy achievement for children in K-2 classrooms.

LDOE has also identified potential lenses to measure K-2 success in the accountability system: measuring student literacy and measuring instructional quality.

**Ensuring that Louisiana students are proficient readers is going to require commitment. The Commission proposes that the Early Literacy Commission continues to meet and monitor the status of the implementation of its detailed recommendations. Also, the Commission strongly reaffirms its January 2020 recommendation on state investment: Dedicate \$15 million annually.**