

For Immediate Release - March 29, 2012

Public/Private Partnership Helps Expand Early Literacy Development and Bolsters Support for Bilingual Families

BROCKTON – Thursday, March 29, 2012 – In recognition of the Commonwealth’s rich cultural diversity, the school readiness initiative *Reach Out and Read Massachusetts* and the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), are joining forces to support communities in promoting children’s and families’ literacy development, and expanding the number of high-quality early literacy opportunities across the Commonwealth. The Patrick-Murray Administration has named closing the achievement gap a top priority, and increasing literacy rates is a critical component of improving educational outcomes for all children.

On April 4th, EEC and Reach Out and Read Massachusetts will co-host *The Journey to Literacy Begins at Birth...and Continues in Many Languages*, a conference that will provide early educators, community and family engagement providers, and pediatric staff with best practices and professional development on advancing children’s literacy in support of improving the educational outcomes of all students. Leaders from across the education, pediatrics and research sectors will highlight the importance of providing high quality early learning experiences for children as the necessary foundation for them to grow into healthy, responsible adults. The event will be held 9am to 3pm at the Conference Center at Massasoit in Brockton, MA.

The conference will provide information on educating communities about introducing the elements of early literacy to Spanish-speaking families from many cultures. Presenters from Read Boston and Raising a Reader will review strategies for introducing the building blocks of early literacy to parents from a variety of cultures, and a research review will highlight the cognitive benefits of early dual language acquisition.

“Providing high quality, enriching opportunities for children in their earliest years is essential to laying a solid foundation for their long-term health, well-being, and success,” said EEC Commissioner Sherri Killins. “Parents, families, and communities have an important role to play in supporting children’s literacy development by exposing them to books, reading with them, and regularly engaging them in their use of language. This conference is a key resource for our Commonwealth’s early educators, who are a critical link to bilingual families in supporting children’s dual language acquisition.”

“Research shows that one of the surest ways to guarantee a child’s success in school is to encourage parents to read aloud to their children each and every day,” said Massachusetts Reach Out and Read Medical Director Dr. Marilyn Augustyn. “Children growing up in bilingual homes face unique challenges when it comes to developing early language and literacy acquisition skills. Reach Out and Read is dedicating this conference to exploring the building blocks of literacy for children growing up in homes where multiple languages are spoken.”

Reach Out and Read is a national non-profit program that prepares America's youngest children to succeed in school by partnering with doctors to prescribe books and encourage families to read together. Doctors, nurse practitioners, and other medical professionals incorporate Reach Out and Read's evidence-based model into regular pediatric checkup by advising parents about the importance of reading aloud and giving free, developmentally-appropriate books to children.

Research shows that by encouraging families to read together more often, children served by Reach Out and Read develop larger vocabularies and stronger language skills. The Reach Out and Read model is endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the program has one of the strongest records of research support of any primary care intervention.

"Research shows that if you intervene in the first five years of life and partner with parents, you can dramatically improve the early literacy skills of a child, putting them on the track for success in school and in life," said Reach Out and Read Chief Executive Officer Earl Martin Phalen. "Childhood development experts tell us that the most important thing that parents can do to prepare their children to succeed in school is to read aloud to them every day."

Through Reach Out and Read, each child starts kindergarten with a home library of up to 10 books and a parent who has heard at every health supervision visit about the importance of books and reading. The program begins at the 6-month checkup and continues through age 5, with a special emphasis on children growing up in low-income communities. Reach Out and Read serves children at 265 locations across Massachusetts, reaching more than 191,000 infants, toddlers and preschoolers each year.

Conference speakers include the *Reach Out and Read* Leyendo Juntos National Advisory Committee Chairperson *Mariana Glusman, MD*; *Massachusetts Reach Out and Read Medical Director Marilyn Augustyn, MD*; and *Reach Out and Read Early Literacy and Research Specialist Jean Ciborowski Fahey, PhD*.