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GOVERNOR PATRICK SIGNS LEGISLATION TO HELP CLOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS IN READING AND GET ALL STUDENTS TO PROFICIENCY BY GRADE 3**Expert panel will develop plan to streamline literacy efforts in MA and ensure all students have access to high quality literacy opportunities**

STONEHAM – Wednesday, September 26, 2012 – Governor Deval Patrick today joined state education, legislative and advocacy organization leaders at the Robin Hood Elementary School in Stoneham to sign H. 4243, "An Act Relative to Third Grade Reading Proficiency," which will help strengthen and streamline literacy initiatives in the Commonwealth. The Patrick-Murray Administration has set a goal of reading proficiency by the third grade for every child in Massachusetts and this bill will advance efforts to provide students with high quality literacy opportunities starting in their earliest years.

"We know that a child who can read by third grade has a better chance to succeed in his or her adult life," said Governor Patrick. "With this legislation, we will develop a plan for students and teachers to achieve that goal, and thereby provide the best chance for our children to succeed in the 21st century global economy."

Three-quarters of children who struggle with reading in third grade will continue to struggle academically, greatly reducing their chances of graduating from high school, going to college or successfully participating in a 21st century high skill economy. However, children who receive high-quality literacy instruction during their earliest years are more prepared for kindergarten and success in elementary school and beyond.

This bill establishes an expert literacy panel, chaired by Education Secretary Paul Reville and an outside expert of children's early language and literacy development that will make recommendations to the Departments of Early Education and Care, Elementary and Secondary Education, and Higher Education on better aligning and coordinating current initiatives and improving the implementation of programs to ultimately get every student in the Commonwealth reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

The panel will be comprised of nine members who will make recommendations on areas including: literacy curricula; effective instructional practices to promote children's language and literacy development in early education and care programs and grades pre-kindergarten to third grade; pre-service and in-service professional development and training for educators on language and literacy development; developmentally appropriate screening and assessment to monitor and report on children's progress toward achieving benchmarks in language and literacy development; family partnership strategies; among others. The panel will also explore ways to leverage existing and new federal grant opportunities and private funding to support language and literacy proficiency for children from birth to third grade.

"The ability to read is foundational to lifelong learning and key to academic success," said Secretary Reville. "Equipping our youngest students with the resources they need for a strong academic start is a central piece of our nation-leading education reform work and literacy is vital to those efforts."

"This bill provides the infrastructure for closing the achievement gap through public/private partnerships that provide both formal and informal learning opportunities that are aligned across systems in support of fostering children's early literacy development," said Department of Early Education and Care Commissioner Sherri Killins. "Collaborating to support early screening, child assessment, and family engagement within communities supports children's reading skills and overall brain development, giving them a strong foundation for future success, which collectively benefits our Commonwealth."

"I am proud to welcome Governor Patrick to Stoneham for the signing of this important legislation, which will help to ensure that every child is a proficient reader by the end of the third grade, a critical benchmark linked to future academic success and positive economic outcomes," said Senator Katherine Clark. "With nearly 40 percent of Massachusetts third graders reading at a level below proficiency, we clearly have more work to do. This legislation represents a wise investment in our children's future, and our

own."

"This bill recognizes the importance of focusing on curriculum, assessment, professional development, and family engagement in order to improve reading proficiency for all children from all backgrounds. The new law is an important step in closing the achievement gap and increasing opportunities for all students in the Commonwealth," said Representative Alice H. Peisch, House Chair of the Joint Committee on Education.

The Patrick-Murray Administration is committed to ensuring that all students have the supports necessary for a successful start and has prioritized efforts to increase early literacy rates as a key strategy in helping students achieve at higher levels and realize long term academic success and positive life outcomes.

In 2010, the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) awarded a \$500,000 grant to the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley to support children's learning and literacy development in the summer months. This funding provided quality enhancements to out-of-school programs to partner with their local school district in providing joint professional development to educators and increased enrichment opportunities for children. Twenty-five programs have participated in the Summer Learning Collaborative (SLC), and over 2,000 children across the Commonwealth continue to benefit from this program each summer.

The Administration is also developing shared practices to build children's early literacy skills from pre-kindergarten through third grade as part of a statewide system alignment strategy to enhance program quality and improve achievement outcomes. This work is further supported by the Commonwealth's successful Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge plan, a four year blueprint for advancement of child, youth and community outcomes in Massachusetts. Last year, the Commonwealth received a \$50M award from the Obama Administration over four years to implement high-energy, achievable education reform initiatives that chart a clear path for closing achievement gaps at an early age, before they begin to form.

"With the signing of An Act Relative to Third Grade Reading Proficiency, Massachusetts addresses a critical benchmark that strongly predicts children's chances of success in school and beyond. Children who struggle with reading in third grade are four times less likely than other children to finish high by age 19," said Amy O'Leary, Director of Early Education for All, a campaign of Strategies for Children. "We thank Senator Katherine Clark and Representative Marty Walz for introducing the bill and thank Governor Patrick and the Legislature for their support. An Act Relative to Third Grade Reading Proficiency recognizes that the path to reading success begins at birth, with children's earliest language development, and includes high-quality early education and strong primary grade instruction. Giving young children the strong start they deserve helps secure a strong future for the entire Commonwealth."

For more information on the Patrick-Murray Administration's early literacy work, please visit www.ma.gov/edu.

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