

SENATE No. 2173

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Joseph A. Boncore

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act relative to early literacy education.

PETITION OF:

NAME:

Joseph A. Boncore

DISTRICT/ADDRESS:

First Suffolk and Middlesex

SENATE No. 2173

By Mr. Boncore, a petition (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 2173) (subject to Joint Rule 12) of Joseph A. Boncore for legislation relative to early literacy education. Education.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**In the One Hundred and Ninetieth General Court
(2017-2018)**

An Act relative to early literacy education.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1.

2 (1) The General Court finds that:

3 (a) All students can succeed in school if they have the foundational skills necessary for
4 academic success. While foundational skills go beyond academic skills to include such skills as
5 social emotional competence, they must also include the ability to read, understand, interpret,
6 and apply information;

7 (b) A lack of reading proficiency by fourth grade creates lifelong consequences, and the
8 obstacles to that goal begin at birth. In order to succeed in school and in life, every child needs
9 to receive proper vision and hearing screenings, among other services;

10 (c) Massachusetts has prioritized early learning through its investments in preschool and
11 full-day kindergarten, and the General Court recognizes that these investments can best be

12 leveraged by adopting policies that support a continuum of learning from birth through fifth
13 grade and beyond;

14 (d) It is more cost-effective to invest in targeted early literacy education rather than to
15 absorb costs for remediation in middle school, high school, and beyond;

16 (e) A comprehensive approach to early literacy education can improve student
17 achievement, reduce the need for costly special education services, and produce a better
18 educated, more skilled, and more competitive workforce;

19 (f) The purpose of this act is to promote the identification and assessment of early literacy
20 deficiencies, to intervene to address those deficiencies, and to provide educator support;

21 (g) The act seeks to increase collaboration among community leaders to analyze the early
22 literacy landscape in their school districts and to deliver early literacy support programs to
23 community members in need;

24 (h) An important partnership between a parent and child begins before the child enters
25 kindergarten, when the parent helps the child develop rich linguistic experiences, including
26 listening comprehension and speaking, that help form the foundation for reading and writing,
27 which are the main vehicles for content acquisition;

28 (i) The greatest impact for ensuring student success lies in a productive collaboration
29 among parents, teachers, and schools in providing a child's education, so it is paramount that
30 parents are informed about the status of their children's educational progress and that teachers
31 and schools receive the financial resources and other resources and support they need, including
32 valid assessments, instructional programming that is proven to be effective, and training and

33 professional development programs, to effectively teach the science of reading, assess students'
34 achievement, and enable each student to achieve the grade level expectations for reading; and

35 (j) This act will assist local education providers in setting a solid foundation for students'
36 academic success and will require the ongoing commitment of financial and other resources from
37 both the state and local levels.

38 SECTION 2. Chapter 69 of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after
39 section 1P the following section:-

40 Section 1Q. The department of elementary and secondary education, hereinafter referred
41 to as the department, shall establish a grant program subject to appropriation to be known as the
42 early literacy education grant program for the purpose of providing grants to assist school
43 districts and Horace Mann and Commonwealth charter schools with the implementation and
44 provision of early literacy education programs and services for students in kindergarten through
45 grade five. To be eligible to receive a grant under this section, districts shall have approved
46 chronic absenteeism, kindergarten screening, and early literacy improvement plans, which target
47 early literacy development by way of assessment, intervention, and professional development for
48 teachers, on file with the department. Such programs shall continue to make use of existing
49 resources in school districts, educational collaboratives, and other agencies, service providers,
50 and organizations. Districts must also have conducted an early literacy education needs
51 assessment. The department shall recommend curricula and interventions, one or more of which
52 each district shall adopt in order to be eligible to receive a grant under this section.

53 Funding shall be awarded to districts on a per-pupil basis at the kindergarten and
54 elementary school levels, giving priority to districts with a higher number of economically

55 disadvantaged, as defined by the department in conjunction with the department of early
56 education and care. The department shall not issue any grant in an amount less than \$50,000 per
57 district per year.

58 Grants under this section may be used to acquire and implement early literacy resources,
59 including, but not limited to: reading coaches; reading interventionists who must be trained in
60 proven approaches for addressing learning disabilities, including dyslexia; school adjustment
61 counselors; supplemental compensation to teachers to perform home visits and collaborative
62 planning time with parents of students; literacy consultants; professional development for
63 teachers, including basic literacy instruction; establishment of summer teacher and student
64 academies; vision and hearing screenings; and early literacy education technology. The grants
65 shall also encourage voluntary expansion of existing early literacy education programs in the
66 Commonwealth, and shall be used to provide early literacy education programs for students who
67 are at risk of educational failure due to reading deficiencies and truancy. Since research has
68 shown that behavioral issues have a negative impact on a student's ability to read, grants may
69 also be used to assist in developing programs that provide a range of approaches to address
70 behavioral issues, such as behavior specialists, in-school suspension rooms and crisis centers, in
71 addition to out-of-school alternative settings.

72 Grant recipients shall develop remediation plans for students that address both academic
73 and behavioral issues. Grants may also be made available for in-school regular education
74 programs that include self-improvement, behavior management and life skills training to help
75 provide students with tools to better manage their lives and attitudes, to support programs that
76 use family-based approaches, and to assist students and teachers during the transition of students
77 back into regular education classrooms.

78 A grant awarded pursuant to this subsection shall require that recipients undertake
79 ongoing program evaluations that document the effectiveness of the program in helping students
80 to achieve and maintain literacy skills. In awarding grants, priority shall be given to programs
81 that employ interventions that have been empirically validated including the use of multiple
82 assessments of progress throughout the school year.

83 The department shall establish guidelines governing the early literacy education grant
84 program. The guidelines shall include, but not be limited to, a requirement that, as soon as
85 possible after a student is identified as having need of a reading improvement plan, a
86 representative of the school district shall meet with the student and the student's parents or legal
87 guardian to develop a reading improvement plan that specifies the responsibilities of the school,
88 the student and the student's parents or legal guardian. The plan shall, at a minimum, include:

89 (a) The student's specific, diagnosed reading skill deficiencies that need to be remediated
90 in order for the student to attain reading competency;

91 (b) The goals and benchmarks for the student's growth in attaining reading competency;

92 (c) The type of additional instructional services and interventions the student will receive
93 in reading;

94 (d) The scientifically based or evidence-based reading instructional programming the
95 teacher will use to provide to the student daily reading approaches, strategies, interventions, and
96 instruction, which programs at a minimum shall address the areas of phonemic awareness,
97 phonics, alphabet and letter knowledge, grapheme-phoneme correspondence, word recognition
98 fluency, invented spelling, vocabulary development, reading fluency, including oral skills, and
99 reading comprehension.

100 (e) The manner in which the school will monitor and evaluate the student's progress;

101 (f) The strategies the student's parent is encouraged to use in assisting the student to
102 achieve reading competency that are designed to supplement the programming described in
103 paragraph (d) of this subsection; and

104 (g) Any additional services the teacher deems available and appropriate to accelerate the
105 student's reading skill development.

106 To ensure that the early literacy education grant program improves students' progress
107 toward increasing reading competency by fourth grade, the department shall:

108 (a) Monitor the performance of school districts that receive grants under this section,
109 including students' progress toward increasing reading competency by fourth grade;

110 (b) Intervene where necessary to ensure appropriate and effective use of grants
111 apportioned under this section; and

112 (c) Facilitate continuous improvement of use of grants apportioned under this section by
113 implementing strategies for school districts to share best practices for improving students'
114 progress toward increasing reading competency by fourth grade.

115 Not later than December 31, 2020, and every two years thereafter, the State Auditor shall
116 conduct financial and program audits of the uses of the early literacy education grant program
117 and the effectiveness of the program in achieving its stated purposes. The State Auditor shall
118 submit the audit reports to the General Court and the Governor.

119 SECTION 3. Chapter 15D of the General Laws is hereby amended by adding the
120 following section:-

121 Section 19. The department of early education and care, hereinafter referred to as the
122 department, shall establish a grant program to be known as the early literacy service provider
123 grant program for the purpose of providing grants to support early literacy initiatives for children
124 ages zero through five. In order to be eligible to receive a grant under this section, districts must
125 conduct an early literacy education needs assessment.

126 Funding shall be awarded to districts with one or more economically disadvantaged
127 students, as defined by the department in conjunction with the department of elementary and
128 secondary education. Regardless of the number of economically disadvantaged students in any
129 district, no grant shall be issued in an amount less than \$50,000 per district per year.

130 The superintendent of each district which receives a grant under this section shall
131 assemble a local stakeholder group of not more than thirteen individuals for the purpose of
132 structuring and administering a competitive grant program for redistribution of the grant funds to
133 early literacy service providers who will serve children ages zero through five in that district.
134 Eligible recipients of the competitive grant shall include grantees across the Commonwealth,
135 which deliver family support programs and care-giver education.

136 The department shall establish guidelines governing the early literacy service provider
137 grant program.