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Amanda Price

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Michigan PreK-12 Literacy Commission: An Update

by Amanda Price

In 2015, Governor Rick Snyder created a Third-Grade Reading Work-Group which would make recommendations to the Governor on how to improve reading outcomes in the state of Michigan. The Governor's call for this workgroup was predicated on recently reported National Assessment of Educational Progress 2014 data showing that 69% of Michigan's 4th graders were not proficient in third grade reading.

The Governor appointed John Kennedy, CEO of Autocam-Medical in Grand Rapids as chair of the workgroup, and also appointed a bi-cameral, bi-partisan group of legislators to the group. Senator Phil Pavlov (R), chair of the Senate Education Committee, Senator Goeff Hansen (R), and Hoon Yung Hopgood (D), represented the Senate on the workgroup. Representative Tim Kelly (R), Representative Adam Zemke (D), and myself were appointed to the workgroup from the House.

The Third-Grade Reading Workgroup met weekly throughout the late winter and spring of 2015. The group brought in educators, superintendents, ISD staff members, university professors and interest groups from around the country to discuss the data around reading, methods various states have used to improve reading and other holistic strategies to address the problem.

The Workgroup made its recommendations to the Governor on June 3 of 2015. The recommendations included five strategies:

- 1) Give every student the research-supported diagnostic and screening instruments, instruction and interventions necessary for success.
- 2) Provide every educator with training to use diagnostic-driven methods with knowledge and fidelity.
- 3) Give every parent the information and support needed to develop early literacy skills, to parent effectively, and to provide for adequate home-supports for every student.



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- 4) Implement K-3 smart promotion to ensure struggling students succeed.
- 5) Provide Michigan residents with accurate data about how our students and schools are performing in growth and proficiency compared to other states, and an annual report on our progress towards the highest early reading proficiency in the nation.

There were three recommendations contained within goal five:

- a. Provide a Kindergarten initial diagnostic instrument
- b. Provide a currently existing, research-based, interim measure of academic progress for K-3
- c. Establish an independent oversight commission

The further explanation and charge of the oversight/literacy commission would be to provide an annual report to Michigan's Governor, Legislature and Department of Education on Michigan's performance as we work to become a national leader in literacy, and that the Commission should use the aggregated data from the K-3 growth and proficiency to evaluate how Michigan's reforms are working and advise Michigan on needed course-corrections and useful adaptations.

On July 27, 2016, by Executive Order No. 2016-18, Governor Snyder created the Michigan PreK-12 Literacy Commission. The Order called for the appointment of 13 members to the Commission, seven appointed by the Governor, two by the Department of Education,

and four members by the leaders of the House and Senate. Commissioners were to come from the business, education and philanthropic communities having a particular interest in literacy in Michigan.

In the fall of 2016, the following members were appointed to the Commission:

Dr. Lois Bader, Executive Director of the Capital Area Literacy Coalition and former Michigan State University Professor

Dr. Steve Goodman, Director, Michigan Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative

Mr. JaNel Jamerson, Executive Director, Flint and Genesee Literacy Network

Mr. John Kennedy, CEO, Autocam-Medical and Chair of the Third-Grade Reading Workgroup

Dr. Kyle Mayer, Assistant Superintendent of the Ottawa Area ISD

Ms. Susan Medendorp, Center Director, Abrams Teaching Lab at the MI Dyslexia Institute

Dr. Naomi Norman, Assistant Superintendent, Washtenaw ISD

Mr. Jeremy Ruitter, President, Early Childhood Investment Corporation

Ms. Nadra Shami, District Language and Literacy Trainer, Dearborn Public School

Ms. Denise Smith, Vice President of Early Learning, Excellent Schools Detroit

Mr. Sean Kottke, immediate past President of the Michigan Reading Association, serves as the MDE liaison to the Commission.

Ms. Amanda Price, Chair, former State Representative for the 89th District and former Chair of the Education Committee

Executive Order No. 2016-18 is much broader in scope than the Third-Grade Reading Workgroup recommendation. The Executive Order charges the PreK-12 Literacy Commission with:

- Suggesting PreK-12 literacy goals for the state and publishing relevant progress reports to the public, the Governor, and legislature on PreK-12 literacy in Michigan.
- Advising the Governor, legislature and Department on how state policy can better align to the unique literacy challenges that schools face based on the school's locale and socioeconomic status of the school's population.
- Investigating, analyzing and advising the Governor, legislature and Department regarding changes in state programs, statutes, regulations and policies concerning PreK-12 literacy.
- Monitoring PreK-12 literacy research, pilot programs and policies nationwide and reporting on their applicability to adoption in Michigan.
- Examine current literacy-focused professional development practices across Michigan and identify and publish best practices.
- Promote partnerships between the state, schools, businesses, nonprofit organizations and philanthropies toward the goals of PreK-12 literacy in Michigan.
- Monitoring nationwide trends in the use of assessments, intervention and data-driven instruction relevant to PreK-12 literacy and make reports to the Governor, legislature and Department.
- Recognize the efforts of teachers, schools, and district that have made great strides in PreK-12 literacy.
- Encourage collaboration between teachers, schools and district around resources, proven methods and best practices concerning PreK-12 literacy.
- Examine and report on proven methods to engage parents in promoting literacy amongst Michigan's PreK-12 students.
- Review the preparation that Michigan teachers receive regarding literacy and report to the legislature and Governor regarding how state policy reflects current research and best practices.

A broad charge indeed.

The Commission has met three times to date. At our first meeting on December 5, the members of the commission reviewed the charge to the commission, determined some of the operating parameters of our organization, learned of the current level of state and federal funding around literacy in Michigan and reviewed current MDE literacy efforts and Early Literacy Initiative Workgroups.

The second meeting of the Commission featured presentations from Cari Miller, Policy Director of K-3 Reading from the Foundation for Excellence in Education on the State of Florida Literacy Initiatives, and from Dr. Thomas Haas, President of Grand Valley State University and Chair of the Governor's 21st Century Education Commission on the progress of the Education Commission and its pertinence to the work of the Literacy Commission

On March 3, the Commission met for the third time and heard two presentations. The first presentation was a data-dive on literacy statistics in Michigan based on recent NAEP data from EdTrust Midwest. We also heard about the efforts of Excellent Schools Detroit from Commissioner Denise Smith and their student landscape, challenges and means by which they are working to address literacy gaps in Detroit area schools.

The Commission is tackling the challenge put forth in the Governor's Executive Order. The statistics we have heard around Michigan's children are daunting. We are in the process of prioritizing where to start and how we can be effective.

Author Alex Munoz observed that, "Change starts with imagination." Michigan is in great need of change in the path of literacy for our children. The Commission members are imagining and working toward the great change that will be required.

Author Biography

Amanda Price chairs Governor's Snyder's PreK-12 Literacy Commission. A former State Representative, Price chaired the House Education Committee, was appointed to the Third-Grade Reading Workgroup by Governor Snyder and served as a Commissioner with the Education Commission of the States. Price is the author of the Third-Grade Reading Bill (HB 4822, PA 306 of 2016).



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