



Early Literacy Initiative Grant Summary Report

**Division of Curriculum, Instructional
Improvement, and Professional Learning**

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MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Table of Contents

Background	7
Overview	8
Data by Local Education Agency (LEA).....	9
Status of Effort	11
Recommendations	12
Appendix A.....	13
Appendix B	14

Background

House Bill 1415 Education—Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, approved by Governor Hogan on May 8, 2018, established, among other initiatives, the Maryland Early Literacy Initiative. In early 2019, the Maryland State Department of Education passed COMAR 13A.06.09 to support the Early Literacy Initiative. The purpose of the Early Literacy Initiative (ELI) grant is to assist up to 50 qualifying Title I schools to implement an evidence-based literacy program in the school to work with participating students to meet literacy proficiency targets by the end of grade 3. The ELI grant is based upon a school-level needs assessment and aligns with the Local Education Agency (LEA) comprehensive literacy plan, as well as Maryland's 2020 State Comprehensive Literacy Plan, Maryland's Keys to Comprehensive Literacy.

This report provides a summary of the ELI grant from 2018-2022; evidence-based strategies employed by participating LEAs; data demonstrating impact; the status of effort; and recommendations to increase success.

EARLY LITERACY INITIATIVE GRANT REQUIREMENTS:

Priority for applications was given to schools with high concentrations of students living in poverty in pre-kindergarten through grade three and strong or moderate evidence-based strategies and interventions.

Applications for funding included:

- evidence-based strategies and interventions;
- a needs assessment based upon school-level data;
- early literacy intervention services for participating students;
- direct services to participating students at least twice a week;
- clear literacy targets at each grade level, pre-kindergarten through grade 8;
- benchmark assessment multiple times a year to identify students who need one-on-one interventions;
- collection of data on student progress at least monthly;
- implementation and monitoring through the LEA or a non-profit organization; and
- alignment with the LEA Comprehensive Literacy Plan.

Overview

There were eight LEAs across Maryland that received grant funding across the years of the grant. The number of years participating ranged from 2-4. The number of schools participating by LEA is shown in the table below. There were 14 different initiatives that were implemented across the LEAs. Some LEAs used one intervention and others used multiple interventions or a combination of interventions. Regarding self-reported outcomes, the LEAs provided information regarding the number of students who completed the intervention as well as those who met the goal for their intervention. An average of 91% of students who attended met the goal set for the intervention. This is self-reported by the LEAs and cases that were missing data or had incomplete data were excluded. There is an ongoing evaluation of these data in progress to further validate the data and expand our analysis of this initiative.

NUMBER OF SCHOOL AND GRADES PARTICIPATING IN ELI INITIATIVE

From 2018-2022, the ELI initiative was implemented in 42 Title I, Part A schools grades PreK to 5.

Table 1: Number of schools participating in ELI by LEA

LEA	# of Schools	Grades Participating
Baltimore City	11	K-3
Carrol County	3	K-3
Charles County	8	K-5
Kent County	3	K-5
Montgomery County	10	PreK-5
Somerset County	3	PreK-5
Washington County	1	PreK-1
Worcester County	3	PreK-3

Data by Local Education Agency (LEA)

Over the three-year cycle of the ELI grant, MSDE ensured that the grant was being administered properly through monitoring and collection of final reports. This section summarizes the progress of the ELI grant for each of the eight LEAs who applied and participated in the grant.

BALTIMORE CITY

Baltimore City utilized ELI funding across 11 Title I schools. Two primary instructional programs supported Title I students with reading achievement through evidence-based practices, including the use of high dosage tutoring through literacy labs and *Reading Partners* programming based in structured literacy. Baltimore City data reports 43% of students enrolled in Literacy Lab tutoring met their target growth goals and 87% of students enrolled in *Reading Partners* met their target growth goals.

CARROLL COUNTY

In Carroll County three Title I schools participated in the ELI grant. Carroll County provided students with structured literacy materials from *The Collaborative Classroom: Being a Reader*, *Lexia Core 5, Foundations, Heggerty*, and *Wilson and Systematic Instruction in Phonics and Phonological Awareness (SIPPS)*. Professional learning was provided to teachers on these materials from certified trainers. According to Carroll County data, between 51% and 99% of students enrolled in ELI funded programs met instructional targets.

CHARLES COUNTY

Charles County utilized at-home libraries, dedicated time in supplemental instruction through literacy centers, and hired literacy tutors for each of the participating Title I schools, as well as a literacy workshop consultant. Eight Title I schools participated in ELI grant funding in Charles County. Charles County's data shows that 82% of students receiving ELI services gained a minimum of two reading levels.

KENT COUNTY

The Kent County ELI program was in three Title I schools and used *Sound Partners* and high impact tutoring as the basis of its ELI instructional support to students enrolled in the grant funded program. Tutoring was provided 30 minutes a day for four days a week. Kent County reports that 69% of students who received this support met growth targets.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Montgomery County utilized ELI grant funds in 10 Title I schools. A variety of structured literacy interventions were implemented, including *Stepping Stones*, *Sound Partners*, and *Lexia Core 5*. Montgomery County reports between 93% and 99% of students made gains in reading growth targets.

SOMERSET COUNTY

Somerset County utilized reading coaches to support students in reading interventions from *Stepping Stones* in three Title I schools through the ELI grant funding. The county placed a major focus on the youngest students. Somerset reports 67% of students enrolled in ELI funded instruction met target reading goals.

WASHINGTON COUNTY

The Washington County ELI program supported one Title I school. Students in the program received 15 minutes of one-to-one intervention four days a week using *Stepping Stones*. Additional programs include *DaisyQuest* and *Foundations* with two days of reading conferences supported with frequent progress monitoring. The data from Washington County shows that students progressed between 26% and 47% on the DIEBELS screener.

WORCESTER COUNTY

Worcester County implemented ELI grant funded initiatives in three Title I schools. The County used the *100 Book Challenge* and *Foundational Skills Toolkits* to provide science of reading aligned interventions. The Worcester County data shows that between 61% and 86% were on or above grade level as a result of the ELI funded programs.

Status of Effort

Based on stakeholder feedback and student participation data, at the completion of the grant all evidence-based program results were self-reported as effective based on non-standardized, local assessments, and the progress that was documented for students. The ELI interventions provided the time and resources needed to support efforts to narrow opportunity and achievement gaps. LEAs continue to review this information for planning purposes.

During the period of the ELI grant, measurement of growth outcomes was challenging due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the 2021-2022 school year saw a return to the typical in person model, several LEAs reported barriers that were presented during the previous school year. It was reported that the continued risk of the pandemic forced teachers and students to continue to prioritize health and safety standards, including social distancing and the wearing of face coverings. Although these safety and wellness practices were critical to the prevention of illness, they did inhibit learning particularly around phonological and phonemic awareness where articulatory movement and awareness are essential.

Currently, LEAs are sustaining efforts from the ELI grant by utilizing materials, resources, and professional learning opportunities for staff and students. They are also braiding funds from other grants to support these efforts.

The MSDE Title I Office will work with the department's Research Office that will complete a rigorous Evaluation of the Early Literacy Initiative. These ongoing efforts include an in-depth analysis of student level data across LEAs to further assess and validate student results.

Recommendations

MSDE encourages all participating local education agencies (LEA) continue to sustain their early literacy initiatives that were supported by the ELI grant. Although the ELI grant program has ended, program materials have been purchased, and are available for learning, which allows for implementation of these programs beyond the grant cycle. In some LEAs, literacy resources, activities, and Spanish and English texts were purchased for students who participated in the ELI grant to continue their learning. These sustainability strategies will allow a number of LEAs to move forward with improving literacy outcomes in ELI Title I schools.

Many schools who participated in the ELI grant have trained paraeducators and teachers to implement grant interventions, and time for these programs has been built into their regular schedule. MSDE urges that all Title I schools implementing early literacy strategies continue to provide learning opportunities to paraeducators and teachers.

Furthermore, MSDE recommends that LEAs sustain efforts by continuing parent and family engagement activities that include opportunities for families to support their child's literacy at home.

As part of the ongoing commitment to instruction aligned to the research on the science of reading, MSDE encourages LEAs to continue the work that was accomplished through the ELI grant. LEAs are encouraged to use other funding sources such as Title I, Part A, Title II, Part A, and the Maryland Leads grant initiative. With these funds, LEAs can continue to provide targeted supports, evidence-based interventions, and professional development that will align and support the goals of the Maryland 2020 State Comprehensive Literacy Plan.

Finally, as part of an LEA's Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan submission and approval requirements during school year 2022-2023, MSDE has worked to make certain that each LEA is required to present a comprehensive literacy plan aligned to the science of reading to ensure that students are reading by the end of the third grade, and are on a path to become college and career ready by the end of the tenth grade. Each LEA's first iteration of their Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan is due March 2023.

Appendix A

Appendix B
