

March 17, 2021

Rep. Robert Sanchez, Co-Chair
Sen. Douglas McCrory, Co-Chair
Rep. Kathleen McCarty, Ranking Member
Sen. Eric Berthel, Ranking Member
Education Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3100
300 Capital Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

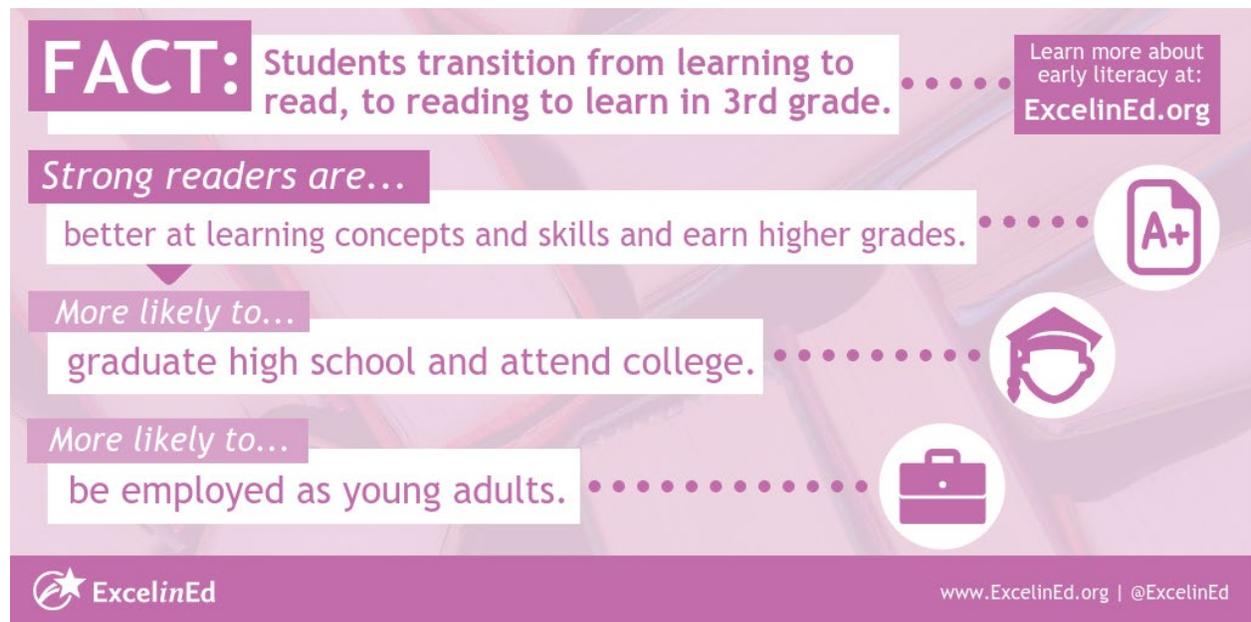
Raised Bill No. 6620: *AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO READ AND ADDRESSING OPPORTUNITY GAPS AND EQUITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS*

Honorable Members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of policy to improve literacy in Connecticut.

From kindergarten through third grade, children are learning to read. Then in fourth grade, they transition to use reading to learn. A comprehensive state-led early literacy policy can ensure all students enter fourth grade with the foundational reading skills they need to learn, graduate and succeed.

In fact, children who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out or fail to graduate from high school, according to a report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For poor black and Hispanic students, that likelihood doubles. Reading is the gateway to learning. If our children cannot read, they do not stand a chance for a successful future.

An infographic with a purple and white color scheme. It features a central flow of text boxes connected by dotted lines, with icons on the right side. The text boxes contain the following information:

- FACT:** Students transition from learning to read, to reading to learn in 3rd grade.
- Strong readers are...** better at learning concepts and skills and earn higher grades.
- More likely to...** graduate high school and attend college.
- More likely to...** be employed as young adults.

The icons on the right are: a document with 'A+', a graduation cap, and a briefcase. A box in the top right corner says 'Learn more about early literacy at: ExcelinEd.org'. The footer contains the ExcelinEd logo and the website 'www.ExcelinEd.org | @ExcelinEd'.

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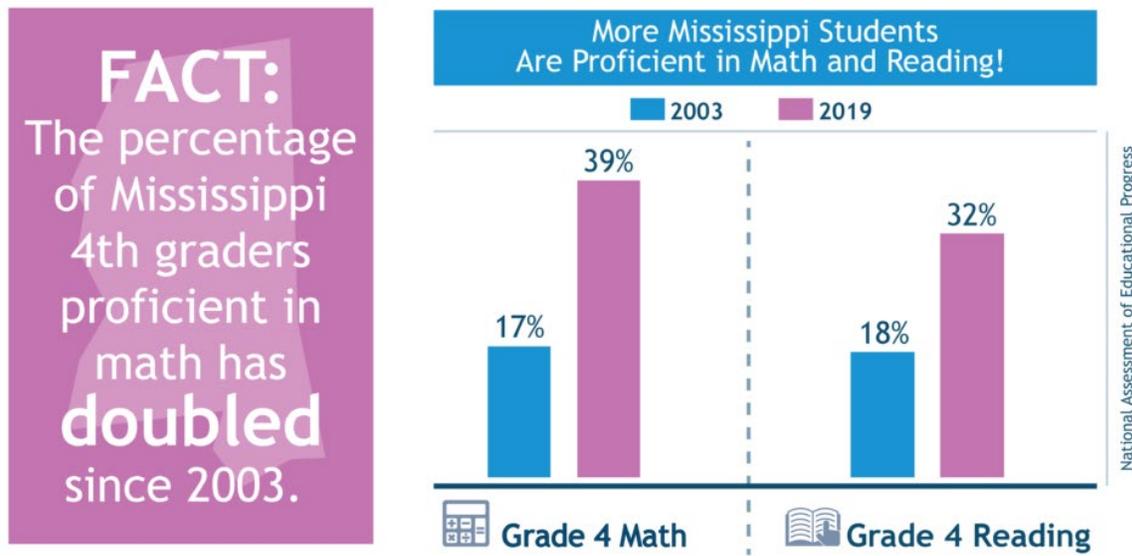
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be employed as young adults.



I currently serve as the Policy Director for Early Literacy at the Foundation for Excellence in Education, where I work with states across the country as they consider and implement policies that impact our youngest learners. After beginning my career as an elementary reading teacher, I served as the State Literacy Director at the Mississippi Department of Education where I led the implementation of Mississippi's Literacy-Based Promotion Act.

As you may know, Mississippi's passage of a comprehensive early literacy law and implementation of the program led the state to see the most gains in the country on the 2019 administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Mississippi made an important statement with the passage of its law, and it is having a profound impact: **the science of reading is critical**. Nearly all kids can become strong readers if they are taught the right way. Research shows that most children—including those identified with reading difficulties—learn to read when teachers deliver explicit and systematic instruction aligned with the science of reading.



As you consider this policy to create a state-led effort to spur improvements in academic achievement and literacy, it is important to focus on the following fundamental principles:

- 1) *Create Individualized Pathways to Literacy* – Early literacy screenings and regular progress monitoring inform individual student literacy plans.
- 2) *Invest in Teachers & Engage Families* – Teachers are equipped to deliver scientifically based reading instruction. Parents are equipped and empowered to support their child.
- 3) *Ground all Policies in the Science of Reading* – Explicit and systematic instruction that includes phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension is scientifically-based.

A person's ability to read is a critical predictor of educational and lifelong success. A strong reading program, beginning in kindergarten and continuing into the third grade and beyond, gives students the best possible chance to maximize their education. As state leaders, you can support this approach by implementing reading-to-learn policies. Over time, this saves state



dollars on remedial instruction and dropout prevention in the later grades and ensures that students have the best chance for a successful life in school in beyond.

Kymyona Burk, Ed.D. 
Policy Director, Early Literacy
Foundation for Excellence in Education
kymyona@excelined.org