



## *Press Release*

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# **Grants Awarded to Build Literacy Skills for Michigan Children**

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LANSING – Five Michigan school districts are being awarded federally funded literacy grants of \$3 million each over a five-year period to begin work to advance literacy skills, including pre-literacy skills, reading, and writing, for children from birth through grade 12, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) announced today.

Districts to receive these awards are:

- Benton Harbor Area Schools
- Detroit Public Schools Community District
- Flint Community Schools
- Muskegon Heights Public School Academy System
- Pontiac School District

“Literacy is the foundation of learning,” said State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice. “These grants and the literacy work that they will fund and inspire in these five communities can be game changers. To build literacy communities for children—in local communities and across the state—is to change academic and life trajectories for our kids.”

The five districts selected for this project will use the funds to begin building local literacy professional learning communities in support of children. These districts will participate in a statewide educational and professional development literacy network to improve literacy supports and outcomes for children and students from birth through grade 12. This partnership will focus on the needs of high-poverty school districts and their children.

Dr. Rice said that the federal grant is aligned with the goal to improve early literacy achievement in the state’s Top 10 Strategic Education Plan and will be supporting families and communities as essential partners of teachers, support staff, and administrators in the education of students.

MDE won a national competitive grant of nearly \$16 million from the U.S. Department of Education (USED) through the federal literacy state development program. In its own competitive grant process, MDE sought applications from local school districts with low percentages of students at or above grade level in literacy. Additional consideration was given to districts that serve high percentages of students who are economically disadvantaged, English learners, and/or children with disabilities.

"Including more school districts from around the state could greatly expand the number of children who benefit from this initiative," Dr. Rice said, "and adding complementary state or philanthropic funding could make that happen."

Superintendents from the five districts receiving the grants are eager to move forward with their literacy initiatives.

"Literacy is our primary focus at Benton Harbor Area Schools," said **Benton Harbor Superintendent Dr. Andraé Townsel**. "An opportunity to get this grant to focus on literacy is a game changer for our young people. We can't wait to execute the plan."

**Dr. Nikolai Vitti from the Detroit Public School Community District** said: "DPSCD is excited to receive this grant because it will continue to expand our current efforts to train all of our teachers and support staff in the science of reading. We know that when we train all of our teachers and support staff on research-based, best practices regarding literacy intervention, our students will respond with stronger literacy skills. The challenge has never been or will be with our students, it's the strategies and materials we use to support them to become grade level readers. This grant will rapidly scale our initial investments in stronger literacy training intervention while also scaling the promising results we are experiencing with student achievement."

"We are honored to receive this grant," said **Kelley Williams, superintendent of the Pontiac School District**. "Literacy is a critical key to success for students. We are proud to steward these funds and look forward to the direct positive impact on our children through the resources and tools it provides."

"I am over the top excited to receive this grant in Muskegon Heights," said **Rané Garcia, superintendent at the Muskegon Heights Public School Academy System**. "This grant will provide critical funds to ensure a stable and cohesive birth-12th grade system where every teacher is an expert reading teacher and literacy is embedded in every instructional interaction. Within the framework of this grant, and in partnership with our families and community, we will build a challenging curriculum and nurturing pedagogy focused on joy and identity to provide the opportunities Muskegon Heights students need and deserve for personal and academic thriving."

**Anita Steward, superintendent at Flint Community Schools** said: "Literacy is essential to long-term success for our students. Flint Community Schools is honored to receive this grant from the Michigan Department of Education to expand on our existing programs. Through the support of this grant, Flint Community Schools will bolster early childhood, upper elementary and secondary programs; establishing greater community and family partnerships; support the transition into our Great Start Readiness programs; and provide parents with additional resources to participate in their child's learning."

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