

Hello!

My name is Siobhan Allen, and I recently joined DESE's Center for Instructional Support team as the new Literacy Program Specialist. Prior to this role, I was a middle school educator for twelve years, working first in Brockton as a Reading Interventionist and then in Hull as an English Language Arts and Social Studies teacher. In both of these roles, I was disheartened by the number of my students who struggled to successfully read and became driven to learn as much as I could about literacy instruction. Through this educational journey, I found my passion as a literacy advocate, and this ultimately led me to my current work at DESE. I am thrilled to be a part of the [Early Literacy in Educator Preparation](#) initiative as we work toward the important goal of ensuring that by SY2024-25, *all Early Childhood, Elementary, and Moderate Disabilities teacher candidates in Massachusetts are prepared, through coursework and opportunities for practice and high-quality feedback, in evidence-based early literacy as outlined in the Mass Literacy Guide.*

I am reaching out today to provide updates about several ongoing projects within this initiative:

1. Early Literacy in Educator Preparation Listening Tour

Over the next few months, I am informally meeting with higher education faculty to gain insight into the current landscape of early literacy education for teaching candidates. I am hoping to talk to as many people in the field (professors, program supervisors, supervising practitioners, etc) as possible, so that our work moving forward is well informed and based on multiple perspectives. Any information shared would be used as data internally, and would help us further determine the needs of Educator Preparation Programs and to shape future DESE efforts. If you are interested, please click [here](#) to schedule a time that works best for you!

2. Early Literacy Observation Tool Pilot

DESE has been working to create resources that will help program supervisors and supervising practitioners focus on early literacy practices aligned with Mass Literacy. These observation tools can be used to provide candidates with targeted feedback after observing whole block literacy instruction. DESE is currently inviting Sponsoring Organizations to pilot the tool this Spring. Visit the [pilot webpage](#) for more information and register [here](#) if interested. We hope you'll consider participating in the pilot to help us strengthen this new resource!

3. Early Literacy Work in PK-12 Schools & Districts

The Office of Literacy and Humanities has also been helping districts across the Commonwealth make the important shift to using evidence-based early literacy practices and high quality instructional materials. Through [GLEAM](#) (Growing Literacy Equity Across Massachusetts) grants, DESE is working to implement deep and lasting improvements in programming in 16 districts through a multi-tiered system of support for ELA/literacy, as well as expanded access to high-quality PreK. Additionally, the [Early Grades Literacy Grant \(EGL\)](#) is a multi-year grant supporting selected schools with

funding for year-long professional learning that focuses on literacy in kindergarten through grade 3.

The [Curriculum Matters](#) initiative is also expanding support and guidance across the state, including forthcoming grants to support nearly 60 school districts and charter schools that are shifting to high quality literacy curricula; free upcoming professional development workshops for teachers and faculty; and ongoing [webinars](#) to build knowledge around the importance of using evidence-based practices in early literacy. This work is also supported by monthly meetings within the Literacy Leaders Network, a space for participants to reflect upon curricular materials, share instructional practices, and connect with fellow literacy leaders from across the Commonwealth.

4. **Optional Formative Feedback Reviews**

Looking ahead, DESE is collaborating with higher ed faculty and national experts to begin developing new program criteria focused on early literacy, which will be part of the updated review process launching in SY2024-2025. In order to gain valuable feedback on the drafted criteria and facilitate the transition to these new expectations for programs, DESE will be offering optional formative feedback reviews over the next two years to approved programs in Early Childhood, Elementary, and Moderate Disabilities. We have recently launched the procurement for a vendor who will partner with us on this important project (the post for this bid solicitation is [here](#)). The bid opens on February 28, and we will begin onboarding the selected vendor in March.

Each of these projects are smaller pieces of a larger puzzle as we move toward our goal, and your partnership and input are incredibly valuable. We do hope you will take opportunities to share feedback and your perspectives so that our work is thoughtful in its approach, and responsive to the needs of schools and organizations who are making these shifts together.

Please don't hesitate to reach out - I am always happy to connect!

Thank you,
Siobhan Allen