The purpose of this document is to outline strategic direction for a Department-led effort to improve early literacy statewide.

**Pillars for Organizing State-wide Literacy Initiatives**

The Get Georgia Reading Campaign has successfully brought together state agencies to focus on a shared goal: All children in Georgia will be on a path to reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

Statewide efforts align to four pillars:

- Language Nutrition
- Access
- Positive Learning Climate
- Teacher Preparation & Effectiveness
Current Literacy-Focused Efforts
of the Georgia Department of Education

GaDOE Divisions Working on Literacy
Several divisions in the Department spearhead these literacy-related programs and projects:
- Assessment
- Career, Technical & Agricultural Education (CTAE)
- Curriculum and Instruction (including English learning)
- School & District Effectiveness
- Special Education Services and Supports

Partners
Furthermore, these efforts involve a variety of state agencies:
- Department of Early Care and Learning
- Department of Public Health
- Governor’s Office
- Governor’s Office of Student Achievement
- Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs)

Several collaborative partners also support these initiatives by hosting the grants and partnering with GaDOE, providing supports for GaDOE-hosted projects, and providing evaluation services.
- Atlanta Speech School
- Braille Authority of North America
- Center for Puppetry Arts
- Children’s Museum of Atlanta
- Emory University
- Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities
- Georgia State University
- Kennesaw State University
- Marcus Autism Center
- University of Florida

External Funds
Externally funded programs and projects provide about $4,760,000 worth of services and supports annually. To date, current grants secured by the Department total over $153,400,000.

Funding for these efforts have come from a variety of sources including:
- US Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
- US Department of Education, Office for Special Education Programs (OSEP)
- United Way
- Marcus Center for Autism Foundation
The majority of externally funded programs hosted by the Department are focused on the “Access” pillar and are funded by OSEP. They provide instructional, leadership, and resource support for children with disabilities.

The most generously funded program overall is the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy program. Striving Readers started in 2010 after Georgia was awarded this competitive grant. Only six states were awarded funding. In sum, the total funding for this seven-year grant is $114,800,000. Striving Readers will expire in 2016-17.

**GaDOE Programs Aligned to Pillars**

For purposes of this report, I have organized the multiple literacy-related efforts of the Georgia Department of Education in relation to the “pillars” of the Get Georgia Reading Campaign. These efforts range from K-12 and address all four pillars.

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<tr>
<td><strong>School Improvement Regional Collaborative Teams</strong> lead curriculum mapping efforts, provide professional learning for teachers, support ELA positions, and provide instructional strategies using data to identify struggling readers and differentiation strategies especially for students with disabilities (note: this is partially federally funded)</td>
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<td>ELA Professional learning and resources created and curated by the ELA team</td>
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<td><strong>Remedial Education (REP) and Early Intervention Programs (EIP)</strong> provide local funding for schools to support reading, writing, and math instruction for struggling learners</td>
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<td><strong>Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Georgia Summer Reading Challenge</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Young Georgia Authors (YGA)</strong> annual competition is hosted by the GA Council of Teachers of English, RESAs, and GaDOE’s ELA team</td>
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<td>An intervention program for children with Autism is conducted with a partnership with the Marcus Center for Autism</td>
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<td><strong>Georgia Dual Language Immersion Institute</strong> is hosted each summer for teachers of dual language immersion</td>
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<td>ESOL/World Languages team offers ESOL, dual language and foreign language teachers regular F2F online meetings for collaborative discussions</td>
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<td><strong>Georgia Project for Assistive Technology</strong> provides tools for Student With Disabilities (SWDs) to access literacy/curriculum</td>
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<td><strong>Georgia Instructional Materials Center</strong> provides accessible educational materials</td>
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<td>An Online Resource Board provides instructional resources for Special Education teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Services for teachers of students who are deaf and hard of hearing are supported by the several resources and programs through partnerships and efforts of the <strong>Special Education division</strong></td>
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Professional Learning experiences via partnerships with Atlanta Speech School, Center for Puppetry Arts, Children's Museum of Atlanta, local system Reading Specialists for MS/HS CTAE students

CTAE’s partnership with Better World Books creates and compiled a list of Early Learning Centers to send information to schools to obtain free reading materials

CTAE supports HS student organizations to support literacy initiatives by participating in competitive events that align with Early Learning Literacy Events (Teach & Train, Early Childhood Education, Focus on Children, Chapter Service in Action)

CTAE, with a variety of stakeholders and partners, created Early Childhood Education/Teaching as a Profession Standards that prepare HS students to become familiar/comfortable with delivering and assessing literacy programs in the educational setting

CTAE and the Georgia Early Childhood Education (ECE) Foundation reviewed CTAE ECE Programs to ensure that students have a learning environment that has a focus on diverse focus on literacy and language acquisition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Privately and Federally Funded Programs and Initiatives (current)</th>
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<td><strong>Activity</strong></td>
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<td>Early Learning Climate</td>
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<td>Literacy Initiative</td>
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<td>Early Autism Intervention</td>
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<td>Talk with me Baby</td>
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<td>Georgia Project for Assistive Technology</td>
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<td>100 Babies Project</td>
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<td>Accessible Materials Project</td>
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<td>Georgia Pathway to Language and Literacy</td>
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<td>Georgia Striving Reader</td>
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<td>CEEDAR Grant</td>
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<td>ESOL support</td>
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<td>Georgia Instructional Materials</td>
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<td>Special Education</td>
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<td>State Personnel Development Grant</td>
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<td>Project ASPIRE</td>
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<td>College and Career Readiness</td>
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<td>GraduateFIRST</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unified English Braille Implementation for State of Georgia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Endorsement Program for Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments: Braille pedagogy</td>
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Some Notes about the Pillars @ GaDOE

Worth noting:

(1) The on-going programs offered by the GaDOE are mostly focused on “teacher effectiveness” and “access.” More could be offered for “language nutrition” and “positive learning climate.”

(2) The final five on-going programs identified as “teacher preparation and effectiveness” are tailored for high school students who participate in CTAE’s early childhood program. Although these early years of choosing a career can inform teacher preparation and effectiveness, GaDOE could offer more programs to support current teachers.

(3) The majority of privately and federally funded programs primarily focus on “access.” These programs are mostly funded by the US Department of Education’s Office for Special Education Programs and are earmarked to ensure that students with disabilities have access to educational opportunities.

(4) Programs that are privately and federally funded that align with “language nutrition” primarily focus on birth-age five. More could be offered to support language development through K-12, particularly in the areas of building background knowledge, academic vocabulary, and rich discussion about texts to support deeper understanding.

Lessons Learned from Georgia’s Striving Readers Program

Striving Readers program is the largest state-wide literacy-focused initiative. Thus, I describe it here to give insight to lessons learned.

In 2011, the Georgia Department of Education created a literacy plan driven primarily by the desire to create an application for the Striving Readers grant program. Thus, the design of Striving Readers was somewhat constricted to requirements of the request for proposals by the US Department of Education.

The grant was designed for P-12 schools and funds birth-age 5 preschools, elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools.

A Georgia Literacy Task Force convened in 2008 to develop a literacy plan that would align to the request for proposals initiated by the US Department of Education’s Striving Readers grant program.

The plan that was developed relied on local school leaders to apply with a focus on six building blocks:

1. Engaged leadership
2. Continuity of instruction
3. Ongoing formative and summative assessments
4. Best practices in literacy instruction
5. System of tiered intervention (e.g., Response to Intervention) for all students
6. Improved instruction through professional learning

To apply for Striving Readers, school leaders need to create a school literacy plan. School leaders conduct a needs assessment for their school based on the six building blocks to determine what might improve performance. An observational checklist is also available for teachers to observe each other as well as for leaders to observe classroom instruction.

The Striving Readers grant-funded program includes a rigorous requirement for assessments of outcomes. The Institutes for Educational Sciences report on the first years of implementation of Georgia’s Striving Readers did not show significant differences between schools that have the grant and those that do not (as measured by the CRCT). However, that finding can be explained by the fact that all schools in Georgia improved during the period examined, including Striving Readers schools.

Another rigorous outcome assessment of the Striving Readers program, conducted by an external evaluator, helps us to know a few important findings. The Striving Readers schools with the most growth:

- Reported high degrees of collaboration and teacher-led, data-based decision making to guide small group instruction and monitor progress
- Used computer-based interventions for reading and writing
- Mapped the curriculum and aligned with state Standards
- Used non-commercial, evidence-based instructional strategies
- Did not use commercial phonics programs
- Had leadership support

Georgia’s Striving Readers grant is due to end by the end of next school year (2016-17) and will likely benefit from a no-cost one-year extension to wrap up the grant program. However, this fall was the final “in-take” year for schools to apply for funding from this particular grant. The grant team is currently working with School Effectiveness teams to assist in pinpointing services in identified schools.

To date, the federal government has not indicated whether the Striving Readers program will continue; however, in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization bills that were approved by the Senate and House, respectively, a literacy-focused initiative was maintained. The ESEA bill has gone “to conference,” and we will not know for sure if a literacy initiative is part of the final version until it is signed into law. It’s important to note that the Striving Readers grant program is a competitive grant program; Georgia is one of only six states that have benefitted from winning funding. If the federal government decides to end this funding, or if Georgia is unable to secure another competitive grant, the loss of this multi-million dollar income will be incredibly detrimental to our efforts to improve literacy outcomes for Georgia’s students.
Moving Forward: A State-wide Focus on Early Literacy

The Department has an opportunity to move forward and become poised to attract new federal grant funds and/or create state-funded programs that (a) leverage current programs to address pinpointed literacy needs; (b) address lessons learned from the Striving Readers program to continue to grow from this experience; (c) explore new directions for expanding approaches to “pillars” not fully addressed; and (d) update the content of literacy instructional supports to address new Standards, the influx of digital technologies, and the most recent research on literacy learning.

Recommendation #1: Pinpointing Local Needs
By convening state-wide agencies, Get GA Reading has been a catalyst for addressing a myriad of issues that relate to third grade reading outcomes. The Get GA Reading Campaign uses a population-based approach to identifying “predictors” of literacy difficulties within communities. GaDOE is involved in several related Get GA Reading grant-funded projects, including some that address early learning among children who are deaf and hard of hearing, early learning climate in educational settings for birth-3rd grade, and aligning P-3 frameworks. GaDOE will continue to work on these and other grant-funded projects to pinpoint services to match local needs.

By leveraging data from across state agencies and public data banks, GaDOE is better positioned to pinpoint needs and provide services. A commissioned study was conducted during July 2015. The study utilized multiple data sources and community connections within the Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs) that are part of the Department of Early Care and Learning’s (DECAL’s) Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant.

Using mixed methods (interviews, artifacts, and quantitative data analysis, including multiregression analysis and pathway analysis), this study found a way to explain third grade reading outcomes per “zone.” Different communities have different “predictors” of third grade reading outcomes. For example, in one community, transportation was the strongest correlation whereas in another community, the income inequality and communication issues were most strongly correlated. By conducting an analysis such as the one used in this commissioned study, GaDOE and other state agencies can better collaborate to address third grade reading outcomes by using a population/community-focused approach.

Furthermore, GaDOEs Collaborative Regions can utilize the method and statistical model presented in this commissioned study to pinpoint services for schools that are identified as needing improvement in reading outcomes. Additionally, DECAL’s 3EZs have community liaisons assigned to each zone to assist in matching services to needs. This community-based approach seems to be working well as a method to map services to local needs. Likewise, GaDOE could assist the Collaborative Regions by assigning community liaisons within the regions to focus specifically on literacy.

Moving forward:
• Share findings with DECAL
• Move forward with “next steps” for E3Zs to pilot a means of addressing needs from a population/community standpoint
• Work with GaDOE Collaborative Regions to expand the model
• Consider what data might be pulled from (or added to) SLDS
• Introduce the model to other state agencies

**Recommendation #2: Learning from Striving Readers**
The Striving Readers grant has provided an opportunity to learn what is most beneficial to schools that have committed to improving reading outcomes. With the potential loss of over a million federal dollars, Georgia should be poised to pick up some of the efforts so that we do not lose lessons learned.

Here are some lessons learned:

• **Publically Post School Literacy Plans.** Every school that applies for Striving Readers must create a literacy plan and tie grant funding to that plan. The plans have been very helpful to schools to focus goals, resources, and efforts. These plans should be required of all schools (as part of school improvement plans) and posted on school websites.

• **Promote Instructional Models with Consistent Performance.** The current planning template for Striving Readers allows for flexibility at the local level; however, this does not always help schools select high-performing models when designing their school plans. The GaDOE should promote an evaluation tool that outlines what to look for in a high-quality model for school plans.

For example, the Reading Recovery model has routinely performed well—at the national, state, and local levels—in many high-quality evaluation studies. This model provides instructional and professional learning guidance that could be helpful to schools as they design literacy plans.

Additionally, Striving Readers has provided online professional learning modules and a free “BookWorms” literature-based curriculum guide via the ComprehensiveReadingSolutions.com website. GaDOE is testing a process of moving some of these resources into a more structured, online professional learning module through the Georgia Virtual School so that teachers can verify their participation.

• **Design or Adopt a Reliable/Valid Diagnostic Assessment for Literacy.** The Striving Readers program promotes the use of diagnostic assessments and teachers use these to track students’ literacy learning across the school year. Diagnostic assessments are flexible and offer normed, valid, and reliable information about each learners’ progress. They are used multiple times in a school year.
In turn, teachers use diagnostic data to structure instruction as they meet each learner’s needs. Diagnostic assessments do not require that all children be on the same reading level; therefore, they can be used flexibly to assess needs and inform differentiated instruction.

Some LEAs have their own diagnostic assessments that provide useful information to teachers. However, not all LEAs have the funding or support for use of diagnostic assessments. GaDOE can offer a valid and reliable diagnostic assessment as well as support on how to use these assessments to inform instruction.

- **Design or Adopt a Reliable/Valid Early Screener.** Screeners are brief assessments that can predict possible risks for later difficulties and provide practitioners with preventative strategies. Some LEAs use screeners, but not all LEAs have the funds or advising necessary to get a screener. GaDOE can offer a simple screener that is free to all LEAs and can be used to promote early identification and prevention of reading difficulties.

The Georgia Kindergarten Entry Profile offers an assessment tool for teachers to identify early learning skills and needs among children entering K-12. As part of this assessment, we can identify or introduce items that offer predictive qualities. In other words, we can develop items that utilize teacher observations of children’s behaviors to predict (and thus prevent) early literacy difficulties. In its current form, the entry profile is not predictive.

- **Publish Striving Readers Findings and Future Steps.** GaDOE can use lessons learned from the Striving Readers program as a way to communicate about the value of instructional support and professional development, promote successes from the grant program, and set the stage for moving forward.

Moving forward:
- Prepare and disseminate a “glossy” policy brief of the Striving Readers program and steps for moving forward with a state-wide effort.
- Communicate the dire consequences of the potential loss of funds to early literacy in K-12 schools.
- Conduct an accelerated pilot to capitalize on a model built from these lessons learned.
- Create or adopt screener and diagnostic assessments.

**Recommendation #3: Addressing Literacy-related Efforts Across the Pillars**

The Get GA Reading pillars offer a way to see literacy learning as a comprehensive process that begins at birth and extends past third grade. This comprehensive process requires participation of multiple divisions across the Department.

- **GaDOE Literacy Cross-Divisional Team.** By convening a group across divisions to regularly take stock of current initiatives and set goals for moving forward, GaDOE can
plot a path to improving third grade reading outcomes in a comprehensive way. These conversations offer a way to communicate GaDOE’s unified efforts to address the pillars, offer critical examination of current efforts, and identify what is needed to provide supports across all pillars.

Two pillars will require attention in the near future:

- **Language Nutrition.** To date, GaDOE’s efforts to address language have been focused on language among birth-5. However, language is important for literacy outcomes at all levels. A focus on enriching the language in primary classrooms through class discussions, enhancing read aloud practices in early grades, and promoting academic language across all disciplinary areas would go far to address literacy learning.

- **Positive Learning Climate.** In short, schools need to have a positive learning climate in order for instructional change to take hold. Therefore, for opt-in/grant-funded projects, GaDOE should insist that schools address learning climate before, or as part, of any instructional or professional learning intervention in literacy. Furthermore, GaDOE’s Climate ratings offer insight to the variability among schools. As part of pinpointed literacy supports, GaDOE can strengthen its offerings to promote positive learning climates through current and/or new programs (e.g., PBIS, MTSS, Leadership training).

Moving forward:

- Begin regular convenings of GaDOE literacy team
- Design strategies to bolster focus in K-12 on language nutrition and positive learning climate
- Design consistent, formative outcomes measures for pillars (similar to “climate” rating)

**Recommendation #4: Update Literacy-Related Content/Standards**

To ensure that GaDOE is up-to-date on all literacy-related content and Standards, the following areas need to be addressed:

- **Updated ELA Content.** When GaDOE introduced the Georgia Standards of Excellence for English Language Arts, the focus for instruction changed. These new standards (and the associated assessments):
  - emphasize writing;
  - focus on informational texts;
  - promote high-quality, academic language; and
  - emphasize literacy across the content areas (e.g., disciplinary literacies)
GaDOE can assist schools to incorporate these elements into School Literacy Plans as well as offer professional learning for teachers and leaders so that good instruction and supports are more readily recognizable. Guidance instructional videos are currently available online at the GeorgiaStandards.org site and the Teacher Resource Link. Using a streamlined professional learning model that incorporates an online presence through
engaged online communities, online courses, and resources, the ELA team can complement face-to-face sessions currently underway.

• **Moving Beyond the National Reading Panel (NRP).** The NRP, released in 2000, has informed many policies and practices related to early literacy; however, researchers have learned a lot in the past 15 years. The NRP focused too narrowly on early decoding skills and, as a result, this narrow focus may not provide long-term growth in reading comprehension.

GaDOE can promote instructional focus on early comprehension (e.g., meaning making), language development, writing, informational text, understanding text usage in society, and critical analysis of texts—in addition to decoding—to more readily support sustainable literacy outcomes. This focus aligns with the “Four-Resources Model” which has been used in other states and nations and more readily fits with the Georgia Standards of Excellence. The Four-Resources Model offers a way to map developmental trajectories across all areas of knowledge and skills that grow across a reader’s lifetime.

• **Digital Citizenship and Digital Literacies** are a “must-have” in today’s society. The State Board of Education adopted the International Society for Technology in Education’s (ISTE) Standards for students and teachers in 2007. These Standards are currently being revised and new Standards will be released in 2016. GaDOE should review the revised ISTE Standards and, pending SBOE approval and a positive review, adopt the standards for state-wide promotion. Furthermore, GaDOE would benefit from creating a role specifically focused on instructional technology and computing. This role would ensure that, across all content areas, technology is integrated and that technology-specific learning outcomes, such as digital citizenship, are intentionally supported throughout the state.

Digital citizenship (which can be thought of as its own content area) promotes positive learning climate online and would go far to ensure that online tools, blended and online learning environments, and technology-focused courses (e.g., computer science, engineering) benefit from the Standards, knowledge, and skills in the area of digital citizenship.

• **Professional Learning.** Create a hybrid model for professional learning with formative measurable outcomes at each phase of teachers’ learning, from awareness to support these updates to literacy-related content and Standards. Personalized professional learning can be supported via online modules. Collaborative communities can be supported through face-to-face and online communities. Guidance for schools to create collaborative professional communities can be provided.

• **Supporting Background Knowledge for Young Readers through Virtual Fieldtrips.** In partnerships with Georgia’s historical sites and museums, GaDOE can create virtual field trips for students to explore these informal learning environments. These virtual
experiences can contribute to students’ background knowledge, which has been proven to be a key element of reading comprehension. Children from low-income and rural communities are sometimes not able to explore these state resources. By making the field trips accessible through an online platform, and by using immersive video production, teachers can provide simulated experiences for their students and tie them to learning Standards and expected outcomes. In some cases, the virtual museum environment can be “gamified” so that the experience is truly immersive.

Moving forward:
- Hire learning technologies/computing specialist for GaDOE to guide learning technologies integration, computer science education initiatives, and digital citizenship guidance
- Hire early literacy specialist for GaDOE to manage projects and provide expertise
- Develop and curate resources for all updates mentioned
- Design professional learning for teachers and measure outcomes for various types of professional development offerings using personalized and hybrid models
- Seek external partnerships with historical sites and museums and Foundation support to pay for virtual field trips