



## PRESS RELEASE

# ▶ MARYLAND READS ANNOUNCES LAUNCH OF THE READ STRONG NETWORK

August 22, 2024

***Statewide Effort Brings Together Education and Community Leaders County by County who are Committed to Building Thriving Reading Ecosystems to Ensure All Children Achieve Proficiency***

Baltimore, Maryland – Maryland READS announced the launch of the READ Strong Network, a statewide effort to ensure every child in the state achieves reading proficiency by bringing together community and education leaders in every county to create thriving reading ecosystems that support students and families outside of the classroom. This summer, READ Strong Network meetings were held in Baltimore City, Queen Anne’s County and Montgomery County with key stakeholders, including school board members, educators and nonprofit leaders. The meetings generated interest from additional counties and READ Strong Network leaders are actively working to develop new partnerships and announce new chapters in the fall.

“We learned at the July State Board of Education meeting that 95% of all children are capable of becoming proficient readers when they have the support they need both inside and outside of the classroom,” **said Trish Brennan-Gac, Executive Director of Maryland READS.** “By bringing together community leaders in Maryland, county by county, we are going to build thriving reading ecosystems that will provide the encouragement and support that students and families need to end the literacy crisis in our state.”

Maryland is currently ranked 40th in the nation in fourth grade reading proficiency, an unacceptable drop from 2013, when the state was ranked 3rd. In an eleven-year span, Maryland’s race to the bottom was the worst in the country. In 2023, only 47% of students were proficient in English Language Arts grades 3-8 state assessments.

At the first three READ Strong convenings the discussions focused on innovative strategies to support and promote reading, **such as utilizing community spaces to foster literacy. Participants brainstormed ways to distribute resources in popular community spots like transportation hubs, grocery stores, and parks. They also discussed incorporating reading initiatives into existing community organizations and** the importance of data transparency and literacy. Participants explored ways to make resources more accessible and foster community-wide hope, understanding, and trust. They underscored the necessity of initiatives that are rooted in the community, developed collaboratively with its members. Additionally, there was a strong emphasis on community mapping and creating incentives for businesses and individuals to

participate actively. The counties envision an ecosystem that is inclusive, transparent, and deeply integrated with local needs and aspirations, fostering a collective commitment to literacy and education.

“The Maryland READS convening was an enlightening experience for me,” **said Tiny Adams, CEO of Leaders Breeders, serving the Baltimore City community.** “Maryland has a literacy crisis and what I learned from our discussion is that we can’t just hope that instruction in the classroom will fix it—we all have a role to play. The Maryland READS initiative is bringing together like-minded individuals and organizations who want to work together to create a thriving reading ecosystem outside of the classroom to ensure every child is proficient in reading. I was excited by the opportunity to share how the Leader Breeders’ reading literacy project, in partnership with Reading Partners, can help and we are proud to join this movement.”

“Relationships and interactions outside of school can impact a child’s ability to read too, whether it is parents and caregivers or after-school programs and places in the community where families spend time together,” **said Kerri Valencia, MD READS Board of Directors.** “The Montgomery County READ Strong Network is committed to ending our literacy crisis and we are proud to be working together as a community to develop a plan to create a thriving reading ecosystem to ensure every child is proficient in our county.”

“Being involved in the READ Strong Convening in Queen Anne’s County stands out as one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever been a part of,” said Alice Tickler, a teacher in Queen Anne’s County. “There is a shared commitment to fostering successful reading skills in children, with each participant contributing valuable insights. The enthusiasm that emerged during this gathering is certain to pave the way for effective measures to address our literacy challenges. Everyone left excited for the next steps and with a renewed hope of eliminating the reading crisis in Queen Anne’s County and throughout Maryland.”

To see some examples of how community-based interventions around the country have impacted reading achievement, please [click here](#).

##

## ABOUT MARYLAND READS

Maryland READS is a non-profit organization that was founded to end the literacy crisis in Maryland. Based on the most current rigorous research and evidence of impact, Maryland READS focuses on three proven paths to closing the literacy gap: improving reading instruction in the classroom through the Science of Reading; creating thriving community-based reading ecosystems outside the classroom; and addressing barriers that prevent students from becoming proficient readers like addictive technology. Through collaboration and strategic partnerships, Maryland READS is building a powerful statewide network to provide community leaders with a place to engage, share best practices, advocate and shape their action plans to ensure all children have the literacy skills necessary for success in school and beyond. Learn more about our growing reading network at [marylandreads.org](http://marylandreads.org)