



## PRESS RELEASE

# ► Maryland READS Launches Initiative to Address Impact of Digital Devices on State's Reading Proficiency Goals

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***Growing Body of Research Highlights Technology's Negative Impact on Students' Ability to Read and Think Critically – Maryland READS Calls for State School Tech Policies to Address This Barrier to Help Address the Reading Crisis***

Baltimore, MD – Today, **Maryland READS** unveiled a new initiative aimed at aligning the state's school technology policies with its reading proficiency goals. This opportunity responds to a growing body of research revealing the detrimental effects of digital devices on students' reading and critical thinking skills.

Maryland READS, in partnership with the **Albert Shanker Institute**, welcomed **Dr. Maryanne Wolf** to speak with education and technology leaders at the Maryland State Department of Education in Baltimore. Dr. Wolf, a renowned expert on literacy and brain development, shared her decades-long work on deep reading, what it is, why it matters and why, in her words, "we cannot work enough" on its preservation in our digital age.

Dr. Wolf explained that meaningful reading requires sustained attention and patience, which are essential for critical thinking, empathy and insight. However, **research suggests** that habits formed while reading on screens – such as skimming and zig zagging – can carry over to how we engage with printed text. Excessive screen time may alter adolescents' reading brains, potentially undermining their capacity for more immersive reading. This shift, combined with reduced time spent on traditional print reading, poses a risk to the reading foundations established through early instruction.

Maryland's literacy challenges are stark: in 2023, only 47% of students met proficiency standards in English Language Arts for grades 3-8, marking a significant decline from previous years. The state's current ranking of 40th in fourth-grade reading proficiency is a troubling drop from its 3rd place position in 2013.

**Trish Brennan-Gac, Executive Director of Maryland READS**, stated "While the impact of the digital era on mental health and academic distractions is well-known, we must also consider how technology affects students' cognitive capacities. Research suggests that excessive reliance on digital devices to read may be a significant factor in the ability to read deeply and critically. Maryland READS is launching an initiative to broaden the conversation on school technology policies

to include the impact of technology on the development of deep reading and critical thinking skills because it is a very real barrier to ending our reading crisis. It is our hope that by taking the lead on this issue here in Maryland, we can set an example for other states that are concerned about the impact technology is having on their students' ability to read and learn."

Albert Shanker Institute's Esther Quintero and Maryland READS' Trish Brennan-Gac published a blog, "[\*\*\*The Threat of Technology to Students' Reading Brains\*\*\*](#)" describing the problem and inviting the reading and technology communities to reflect and converge around this important issue with more information about the initiative. For more information about Maryland READS visit [MarylandREADS.org](http://MarylandREADS.org).

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## 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)

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