



# Maryland’s Opportunity to Lead through Literacy Coaching\*

In 2021, Maryland made a historic investment in the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future. In recent years, Maryland also increased focus on Science of Reading based policies and practices. Just last year, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) secured \$6.8M from the Ibis Group to fund educator training over four years.<sup>1</sup> These are important steps, but training and resources are not enough. **Teachers need ongoing, job-embedded coaching to shift from outdated methods to effective new practices.**

**Evidence continues to mount:** Just recently, Georgia reported a 15% improvement in student reading after placing full-time coaches in its lowest-performing schools for a single year.<sup>4</sup>

District and school-based literacy coaches provide this critical support, working alongside teachers to set goals, model lessons, and use data to improve instruction. To strengthen this system, MSDE launched a statewide coaching model that trains local coaches and deploys a full-time corps of state literacy coaches directly into classrooms throughout our state where teachers are most in need of their support.

**State leaders now have the opportunity to build on this progress with a transformative investment: funding a fully developed statewide coaching program to ensure teachers receive the sustained support they need to deliver high-quality literacy instruction.**

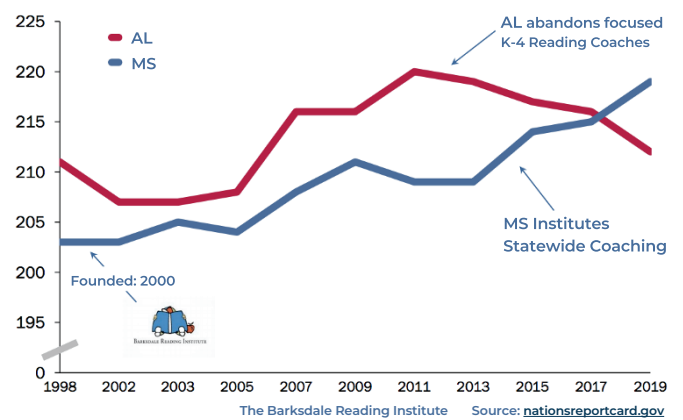
## The Need for a Coordinated Coaching Program

Reading proficiency rates in Maryland are far from the 95% level that research tells us is possible.<sup>2</sup> Maryland Superintendent Dr. Carey Wright saw this firsthand in Mississippi, where reading scores rose sharply after she launched a statewide coaching program in 2013–2014. While many districts employ literacy coaches, those coaches also need guidance to fully shift to new methods. **A coordinated, statewide program can ensure alignment across districts and drive measurable gains.**

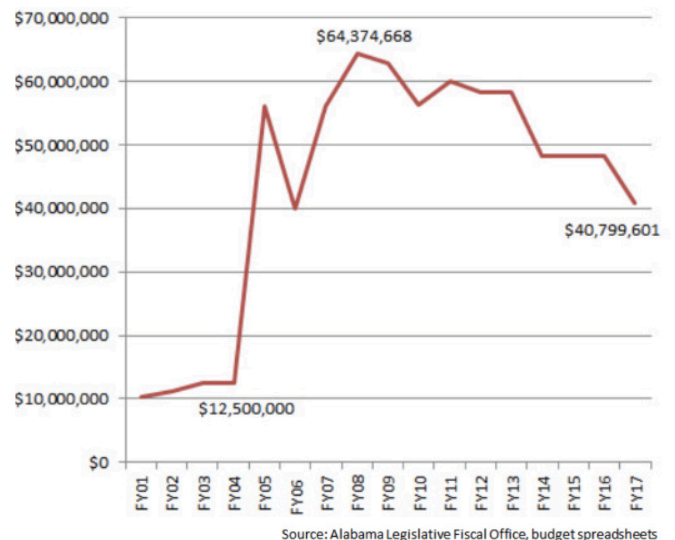
## Effectiveness of Coaching

Research and experience confirm the power of coaching. Although many districts have literacy coaches, competing demands on their time often prevent them from providing the ongoing, job-embedded support teachers need to transform their practice.<sup>3</sup>

MS v Alabama 4th Grade Reading Score — 1992 to 2019  
Average Scale Score



Alabama Reading Initiative Funding



## What is a Literacy Coach?

As defined by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), “The primary role of the State literacy coaches is to:

- ▶ Support the development of school and district-based coaches [and]
- ▶ Use the coaching model to enhance teachers’ literacy practices through non-evaluative, ongoing, and job-embedded professional learning.<sup>5</sup>

**Unlike reading specialists, who work directly with students, literacy coaches focus on teachers. While reading specialists teach students, literacy coaches guide teachers — analyzing data, modeling lessons, and supporting instructional change.**

What exactly do state level literacy coaches do? Duties include:<sup>6</sup>

- ▶ Assist LEA coaches in using data to provide support and recommend changes in practice.
- ▶ Support individual coaches to ensure that teachers have specific goals and improvement plans.
- ▶ Support the district-wide literacy initiatives, promoting evidence-based literacy practices, and aligning them with Maryland’s Comprehensive Literacy Plan.
- ▶ Provide guidance in early identification and intervention of using assessment systems and the MTSS framework.
- ▶ Develop and share coaching tools and resources.
- ▶ Conduct regular site visits to support LEA literacy coaches.
- ▶ Assist school administration, literacy coaches, and lead teachers in reporting progress and tracking results.

## The Importance of Quality Coaching

Coaching success hinges not just on what is taught but how it’s implemented. Research identifies essential elements that drive better teaching and learning:<sup>7</sup>

- ▶ **TRUST:** Coaches serve as collaborative partners — not evaluators — supporting teachers through professional development, data analysis, and shared goal setting.<sup>8</sup>
- ▶ **CONTENT FOCUS:** Coaching centers on subject-specific content and how students learn it.
- ▶ **ACTIVE LEARNING:** Teachers actively engage through observation, feedback, student work analysis, and presentations, rather than passively listening.
- ▶ **COHERENCE:** Coaching aligns with curriculum goals, teacher knowledge and beliefs, student needs, and local and state policies.
- ▶ **SUSTAINED DURATION:** Professional development is ongoing throughout the school year, with at least 20 hours of contact time.
- ▶ **COLLECTIVE PARTICIPATION:** Groups of teachers from the same grade, subject, or school participate in professional development activities together, building a collaborative professional community.

“I have been going to the coaching symposiums and trainings put on by MSDE. They have taken time, but you leave every time with tools that are so useful and helpful! For example, I’ve told so many people about SMARTIE goals - SMART goals that involve inclusion and equity. It’s still early steps, but the potential is really there.”

Jaime Paschall, Resource Teacher, Prince George’s County Public Schools

## Maryland's 's Current Approach to Literacy Coaching

Maryland currently uses various district and school-based coaching approaches funded by Maryland Blueprint funds, county funds, and other sources. **In 2025, new Read and Lead competitive grants were awarded to 15 LEAs/Entities with 10 specifying that funds would be used for coaching projects.**<sup>9</sup>

At the state level, MSDE is building a statewide coaching program. Progress includes:

- ▶ Hiring two statewide literacy coaches.
- ▶ Delivering spring trainings (2025) for district and LEA coaches.
- ▶ Starting a fall cohort of educators from Frederick, Montgomery, and Somerset counties.

Educators who have worked with MSDE's existing coaching program find it very beneficial. In February, individuals shared their successes at a virtual Happy Hour facilitated by Maryland READS:

"I think you can see immediate success from coaching if you are well prepared as a coach, and you set really clear goals. You can have those small wins. Small wins create momentum, and habits form. One coaching session can create actually sizable change in a classroom."

Natalia Walter Adamson, Chief Academic Officer of KIPP Baltimore Charter Schools in Baltimore City

*Coaching requires funding to support all LEAs. Two statewide coaches and a small team at MSDE cannot adequately support literacy coaches and teachers across all 24 Maryland LEAs.*

## What Needs to Happen Next

Maryland has steadily invested in Science of Reading reforms since the award of the Maryland Leads grants in 2022. Additionally, MSDE secured over \$60 million in federal and private grants. However, 4th grade literacy improvements remain inconsistent. A robust statewide coaching program can change that trajectory, ensuring that every teacher receives the support they need and every student has the chance to succeed.

This is the legislature's opportunity to show the Nation that Maryland is committed to making the necessary investments to realize the promise of the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*.

*If we make only one new investment in education, we should place our bets here.*

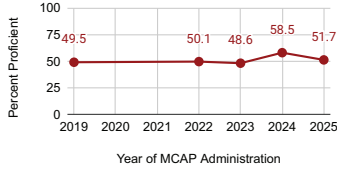
## ENDNOTES

1. [MSDE Offered Science of Reading Micro-Credential Courses](#)
2. [Narrowing the Third-Grade Reading Gap](#)
3. [The Long View of Literacy in Mississippi: Major Components](#)
4. [Literacy coaches are making an impact](#)
5. [Maryland Literacy Coaches Job Description](#)
6. [Maryland Literacy Coaches Job Description](#)
7. Desimone & Pak, 2017
8. [The Impact Literacy Coaching Has on Low Performing Schools in Mississippi](#)
9. [Read and Lead Maryland: The MD Comprehensive Literacy State Development \(CLSD\) Grant](#)

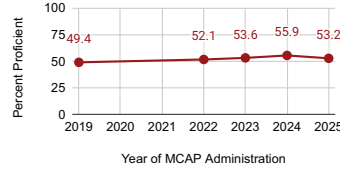
\* Maryland READS extends appreciation to Charlotte Sanford whose research, data analysis, and drafting contributed to the development of this brief.

# 4th Grade Reading Proficiency Rates Since 2019

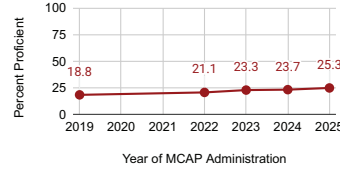
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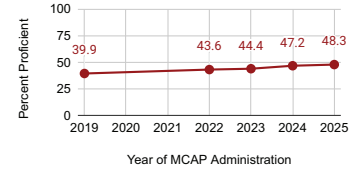
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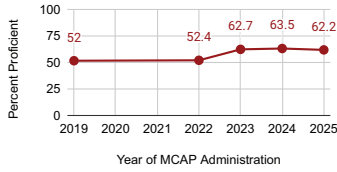
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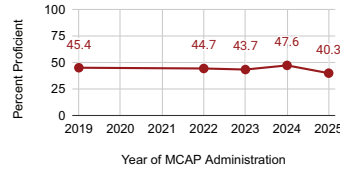
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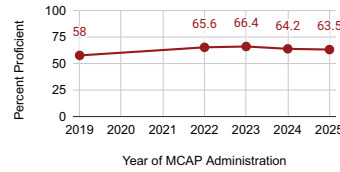
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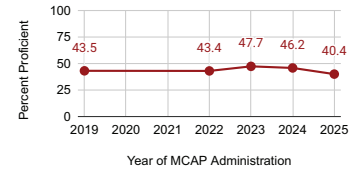
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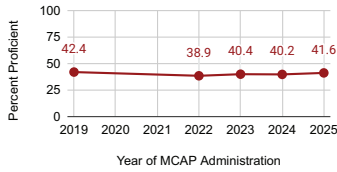
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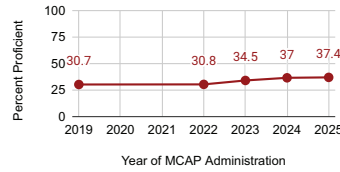
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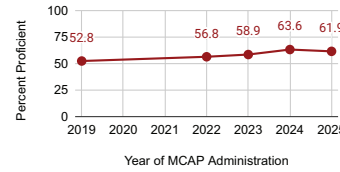
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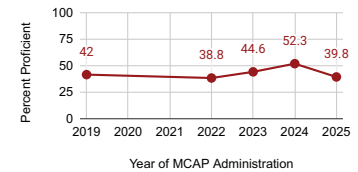
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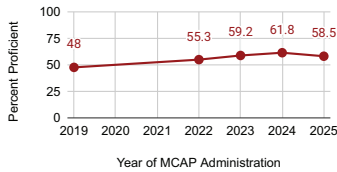
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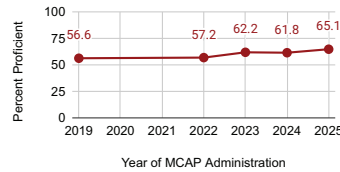
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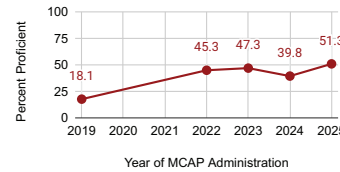
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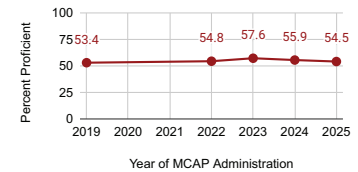
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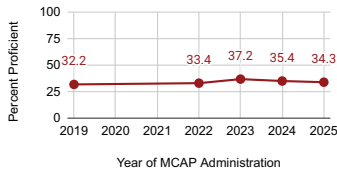
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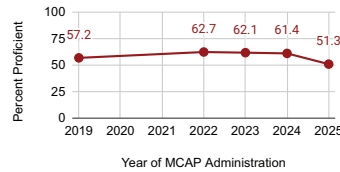
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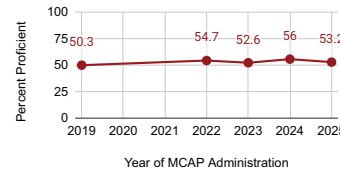
**Prince George's**



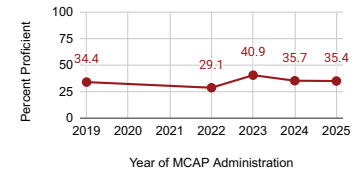
**Queen Anne's**



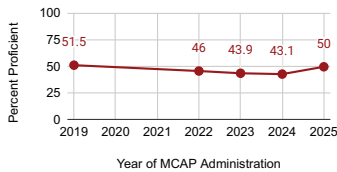
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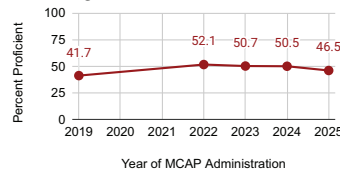
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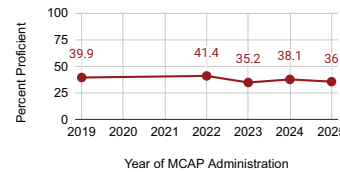
**Talbot**



**Washington**



**Wicomico**



**Worcester**

