

THE STATE OF READING IN MARYLAND, 3RD EDITION

# WHAT ARE THE STORIES BEHIND THE SCORES?



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THE DATA

SYSTEM OF SUPPORT

CALL TO ACTION

RESOURCES





## LETTER FROM OUR Executive Director

Trish Brennan-Gac, JD, Executive Director, *Maryland READS*

It's hard to believe that it has been just two years since Maryland READS' public launch. In that time, we've witnessed **remarkable momentum in our state — driven by new leadership, bold policy decisions, and the continuing rollout of Maryland's Blueprint for the Future.**

Across our reports, Maryland READS has chronicled this transformation through a clear timeline that documents the swift and decisive actions of state leaders who recognize that reading proficiency is the foundation of educational success. We applaud their commitment and the tireless work of educators, advocates, and policymakers who are striving every day to provide Maryland's children with the instruction and support they deserve.

**As the latest test results remind us, our work is far from done.**

Yet, as the latest test results remind us, our work is just beginning. Maryland is making progress — but we still have a long way to go to ensure that every child becomes a confident, capable reader. **To accelerate the momentum that is building statewide, three key actions can make a powerful difference:**

### 1. Greater Transparency

Transparency builds trust — and trust strengthens systems. During the development of this report, we repeatedly heard from educators and families who could not access basic information about teacher training or county-level reading curricula. These are core components of a strong literacy framework, and they should be available and easy to find.

Maryland READS works to fill this gap by making such information public and understandable. We urge MSDE and local school systems to join us in increasing transparency. Sharing this information openly will help build stronger partnerships with parents, communities, and local leaders who are essential to our collective success.

### 2. Strategic, Sustained Investment in Coaching

The legislature has a unique opportunity to take the next big step in Maryland's education transformation — by creating a committed funding source for a statewide literacy coaching program. When the Blueprint was enacted, the concept of a comprehensive statewide coaching network wasn't yet on the radar. Today, we know that high-quality, sustained coaching is one of the most powerful tools we have to help teachers translate the Science of Reading into daily practice. It's time to make that vision a reality.

### 3. Restructuring Teacher Preparation Programs

Maryland's higher education institutions play a critical role in shaping the next generation of teachers. While many programs are making progress aligning coursework with the Science of Reading, too many teacher candidates graduate without the hands-on skills or confidence to apply this knowledge in classrooms. We need to bridge the gap between theory and practice — ensuring that every new teacher is prepared to deliver effective reading instruction from day one.

**These three shifts — transparency, strategic investment, and stronger teacher preparation — can transform our momentum into measurable, lasting change.**

Together, we can make Maryland a model for what's possible when a state unites behind literacy. Thank you for standing with us, and helping us turn data into action for Maryland's children.

## Acknowledgments

Maryland READS is deeply grateful to the individuals and organizations — both within and beyond our state — who are making reading a priority and helping us turn momentum into measurable change.

The start of 2025 was a challenging time for many nonprofit organizations, and we are especially thankful for the steady leadership of our President, **Jennifer Bell-Ellwanger**; our Secretary, **Winsome Waite**; and our founding board members, **Lisa Blottenberger** and **Ellen O'Neill**. We extend heartfelt appreciation to **Kerri Valencia**, who strengthened our work during her tenure. She is greatly missed.

Our accomplishments this past year were made possible through the generous support of our funders:

**The Jack Tarver Family Fund**

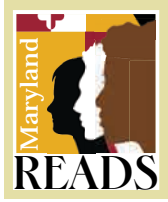
Nam-Macgill Family Fund

SHERMAN FAMILY FOUNDATION

We are equally grateful for our exceptional corps of interns — **Zoe Macer**, **Meghan Musselman**, and **Charlotte Sanford** — whose talent, curiosity, and commitment embody the promise of Maryland's next generation. Their decision to remain with us for three semesters reflects both their dedication and the shared purpose that drives our mission.

This year marked an exciting milestone as Marylanders across the state came together to launch **READ Strong Networks in Baltimore City, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, Queen Anne's County**, and our newest addition in **St. Mary's County**. We were honored to welcome new members to our Maryland READS Expert Advisory Delegation, whose expertise continues to guide our statewide efforts.

To everyone who has joined us in this work — donors, partners, advocates, and volunteers — thank you. Your support and engagement matter now more than ever as we strive to ensure that every Maryland child becomes a confident, proficient reader.



# Your Support for Maryland READS Can Turn the Tide

Behind every data point in this report is a child — a student with potential waiting to be unlocked. The numbers show both progress and persistent gaps, but the story they tell is clear: Maryland's reading crisis is an extremely difficult challenge that will not fix itself. It will take all of us, including parents, educators, community leaders, and philanthropists, working together to build a state where every child can read with confidence and purpose.

Maryland READS turns data into action. We connect policy with practice, helping schools strengthen reading instruction. We engage communities to support parents and children in their journey toward reading proficiency.

We support community leaders working to remove the barriers that hold students back. We are the connective tissue that brings state policy, classroom practice, and community engagement together.

**When you invest in Maryland READS, you're not just funding programs, you're fueling futures.**

**We cannot change Maryland's reading crisis on the backs of volunteers alone.**

Volunteers are vital — they tutor, mentor, lead, and inspire — but lasting change requires professional expertise, consistent coordination, and statewide infrastructure. Communities need support from our team. We provide resources as well as experts who can analyze data, convene partners, establish networks, support local program design, and scale what works. That's where your donation makes the difference.

**Your investment fuels our progress and impact.**

It helps us promote teacher training opportunities, expand our READ Strong Network, strengthens data transparency, and builds the partnerships that accelerate reading achievement across Maryland. Every donated dollar build our capacity to ensure that children in every county, from Allegany to Worcester, have the same chance to thrive.

The path to literacy for all Maryland children is within reach but only if we act boldly now.

We can be the first state in the nation to make dramatic progress **and** end its reading crisis. We can prove that progress is possible when we lead with data, collaboration, and heart.

When you invest in Maryland READS, you're not just funding programs, you're fueling futures.

**Visit our website to make your contribution today.**

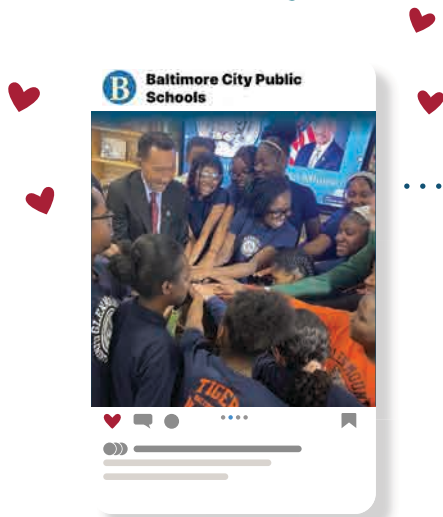
**[marylandreads.org/donate](https://marylandreads.org/donate).**

Scan to donate to MD READS.



# Stories Behind the Scores

Baltimore City, Charles, Dorchester, and Howard Counties were the only 4 school districts to see improvements in 4th-, 8th- AND 10th-grade MCAP scores. We asked them to tell us the story behind the scores and here's what they said.

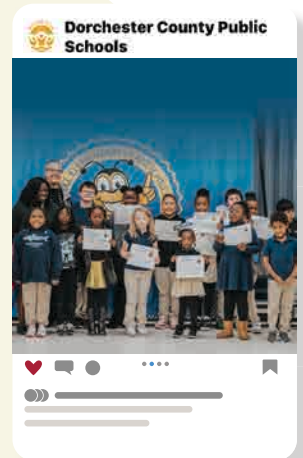


## BALTIMORE CITY

Baltimore City Schools' strategic investments in literacy and math continue to fuel student growth. City Schools students achieved a ninth consecutive year of gains in English Language Arts (literacy) on the Maryland state assessments and demonstrated three consecutive years of increases in math scores, equaling the statewide increases.

## DORCHESTER COUNTY

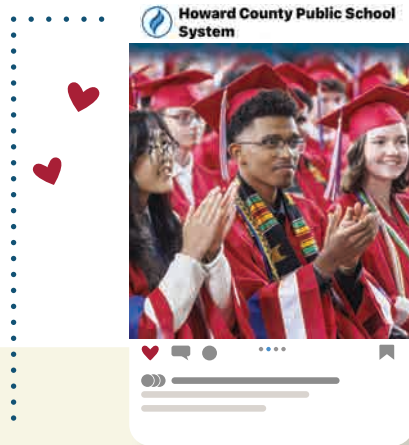
Dorchester County Public Schools is proud of the tremendous growth students achieved on last year's grades 3-8 ELA MCAPs and remains steadfast in our commitment to provide all learners with the tools and support they need to thrive. We continue to provide central office and school-based staff with training in the science of reading, empowering our educators to implement evidence-based literacy practices in every classroom. In addition to professional learning, we are piloting and adopting curricular materials closely aligned with the science of reading, ensuring our students have access to high-quality resources that support best practices in literacy. We are also prioritizing expanded digital writing and assessment opportunities at the elementary level, helping students develop greater automaticity and confidence. Additionally, teachers encourage students to reflect on their previous year's scores and set meaningful, personalized targets for growth, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and self-motivation.





## CHARLES COUNTY

As a district, Charles County Public Schools prioritized Writing Standard 2 with each school implementing strategies that would target the interconnected skills (comprehension and analysis, organization of ideas, academic discussion, purposeful composition) necessary for strong written communication. In alignment with district initiatives, the elementary level prioritized fidelity to the core program and standards-based instruction, and the secondary level transitioned to an Understanding by Design curriculum framework that supports data-informed and standards-focused instruction.



## HOWARD COUNTY

The Howard County Public School System developed four key strategies that have led to improvements in reading.

- Clarity in Learning: We are actively working to reduce curricular confusion for our students, ensuring a clear and coherent learning path in every subject.
- Targeted Support: We're making sure interventions align directly with first-time instruction, creating a seamless, powerful system of support that addresses student needs immediately and effectively.
- Strong Foundation: Our elementary schools benefit from robust teacher coaching, providing continuous support for planning and instruction and professional learning. Schools are also adequately staffed with trained reading interventionists who provide remediation.
- Instructional Resources: We are implementing high-quality instructional materials across our schools, grades K-5, giving our teachers the tools to engage students and deepen learning.

Only when we pair the skills and supports we provide, with the hope they achieve, can students successfully navigate their learning experiences and graduate with their dreams intact.

# Executive Summary

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## Maryland's Reading Challenge: Urgency, Progress, and Pathways Forward

### The Urgency of Reading in Maryland

This year, the urgency is clear: literacy is foundational, and Maryland's future depends on it. Our latest analysis reveals that while pockets of progress are emerging — especially among older students whose learning years were uninterrupted — much of the state remains mired in a reading crisis that began long before the pandemic. More than 94,000 students in just three grades (4th-, 8th- and 10th) are currently unable to read proficiently, and over two-thirds of 4th and 8th graders are reading far below their grade level. Clearly, maintaining the status quo is not an option.

### Strategic Paths to Reading Recovery

Maryland READS has identified three essential strategies to reverse this trend:

1. Improving reading instruction so that it aligns with the Science of Reading
2. Advancing thriving, community-wide reading ecosystems
3. Addressing barriers such as screen overuse and chronic absenteeism that hinder student success

### Signs of Progress and Continuing Challenges

There are early signs of recovery. High school-level progress is solidifying, with 20 Local Education Agencies (LEAs) improving 10th-grade proficiency rates. Notably, both the highest- and lowest-performing districts have shown gains in 10th grade. Community schools are also showing early signs of progress as they move the need to improve attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism. When children are not in school, they fall behind. Improvements in attendance are an indicator that improvements in reading proficiency rates are just around the corner — *if we maintain our efforts*.

Yet, at the crucial 4th-grade level — where foundational literacy is established — only seven LEAs improved, while 17 saw declines. This concerning pattern highlights the lingering impact of early learning disruptions from COVID-19 and emphasizes the need for swift, targeted interventions for students who are not reading on grade level.

## Equity and Diversity in Reading Achievement

Maryland's diversity is a strength but the data shows that persistent inequities remain for students in different socio economic groups and for those who are multilingual learners. While most student groups saw modest gains in 2024–2025, achievement gaps remain wide, particularly for multilingual learners and students from low-income communities. Equity in reading means ensuring every child, in every ZIP code, has access to effective teaching and support.

## The People Stories Behind the Data

Every data point represents a real story — a teacher reinventing instructional methods, a student rediscovering confidence, and a community school mobilizing to assist families. These narratives serve as a powerful reminder that data is not just about measurement; it is also a source of motivation for change.

## Implementation of the Science of Reading: The Key to Lasting Change

Effective implementation of the Science of Reading is crucial. When we are asking adults to change long-held practices, we must acknowledge that they need support. It's not enough to provide them with training opportunities to improve their knowledge about the Science of Reading, we must also support them in developing the skills they need to apply what they learned. They also need the right tools. High-quality curricula must be supported by investments in teacher training and coaching. Maryland's adoption of the Science of Reading approach is a step forward, but lasting progress will depend on equipping educators with sustained, job-embedded support that has a consistent stream of funding.

## Conclusion: A Time for Hope and Action

This is a moment of both hope and urgency. Maryland can lead the nation in reading if leaders, educators, and communities act together. Success will be measured by transforming the stories behind the data into stories of achievement and opportunity for every child.



# The Data

## How much do you know about how students in YOUR county are doing in school?

Looking at data is like checking your body's health. If your temperature is 98 degrees and your pulse is 80 beats per minute, you're more likely to be healthy. But if your temperature or pulse is a little high or a little low, it may be a sign of something wrong. If it's way off, you know you're sick. This is a warning to visit a doctor, figure out what's wrong, and how to fix it.

Maryland READS uses the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and The Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) reading scores as a temperature and pulse check on how well our schools are doing at teaching reading. If our schools are doing well, we expect most students to have good reading scores.



## ABOUT THE DATA

Our reading proficiency scores come from two data sources:



The National Assessment of Educational Progress is run by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and managed by the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB). The English language arts test measures how well students can read. Since the same test is given in every state, it helps us compare how students are doing in different states. That's why it's often called The Nation's Report Card. [www.nationsreportcard.gov](http://www.nationsreportcard.gov)



The Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) is run by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and follows the Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards (MCCR). These standards show what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. When we say a student is proficient on a state reading test, it means they are reading at the level they should be for their grade. We can use MCAP tests to see how students improve each year. [www.reportcard.msde.maryland.gov](http://www.reportcard.msde.maryland.gov)

# Trends within Maryland

As Marylanders, we take great pride in our communities and the counties we call home. But pride alone isn't enough — it must be matched with progress we can measure. At Maryland READS, we believe that the education of our children is a cornerstone of every thriving community. A community's true strength lies in how well it educates its children. That's why we look closely at Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) reading scores: they tell us whether our pride is reflected in real, measurable gains in reading success.

1. How much do you know about how students in YOUR county are doing in school?
2. Does your belief about the strength of your county's schools align with the data in our report?

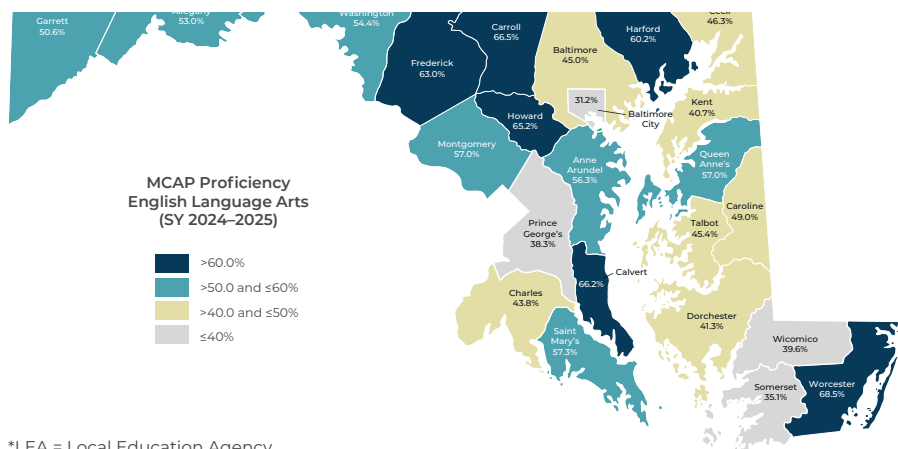
## District Performance

Reading proficiency rates change each year. Our hope is that each year, we will see the scores of students in all of our school districts increase. **In 2025, the lowest proficiency rates went up but the highest proficiency rates declined.**

- In the 2024-2025 school year, English language arts (ELA) proficiency for all tests combined varied from **31.25 to 68.5%** across local education agencies (LEAs).
- In the 2023-2024 school year, ELA proficiency for all tests combined varied from **27.7% to 69.4%** across LEAs.

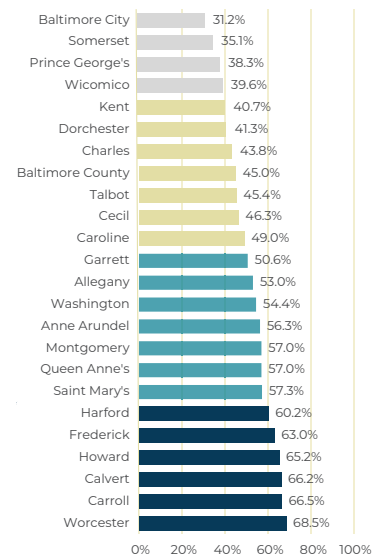
### ELA Proficiency by LEA\*, SY 2024-2025

ELA proficiency for all tests combined varied from 31.2% to 68.5% across LEAs.



\*LEA = Local Education Agency

### 2025 ELA Proficiency





While the proficiency rates in the lowest performing district went up, the proficiency rates in the highest performing district declined.

## Student Performance

Our report examines the annual performance of 4th-, 8th-, and 10th-grade students to assess how schools are supporting literacy development at key stages. However, this snapshot approach reflects grade-level instruction rather than student growth over time.

Overall, the data shows encouraging progress — Maryland students are becoming stronger readers as they advance through school. The notable exception is the cohort of children who were in kindergarten and 1st grade during the COVID-19 pandemic — whose foundational years of learning were disrupted. They are the only students in the graph below to show a decrease from 2022-2025.

### Cohort Proficiency Trends, ELA<sup>1</sup>

Four of the five past grade 3 cohorts have increased ELA proficiency since 2022.

#### MCAP ELA Cohort Proficiency by Grade

Cohort Grade Span	Proficient						Change from 2022 to 2025 (in percentage points)
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	
3–8	--	--	42.5%	50.4%	51.0%	51.4%	<b>8.9</b>
3–7		--	47.4%	43.3%	50.0%	55.5%	<b>8.1</b>
3–6			45.9%	49.4%	45.1%	52.1%	<b>6.2</b>
3–5				48.3%	50.2%	46.3%	<b>-2.0</b>
3–4					46.7%	49.2%	<b>2.5</b>

Note: Cohorts are defined starting in grade 3 and require a test result each following year. No assessment was administered in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 assessment was given in the fall of SY 2021–2022 on content from the prior school year in a shortened assessment.

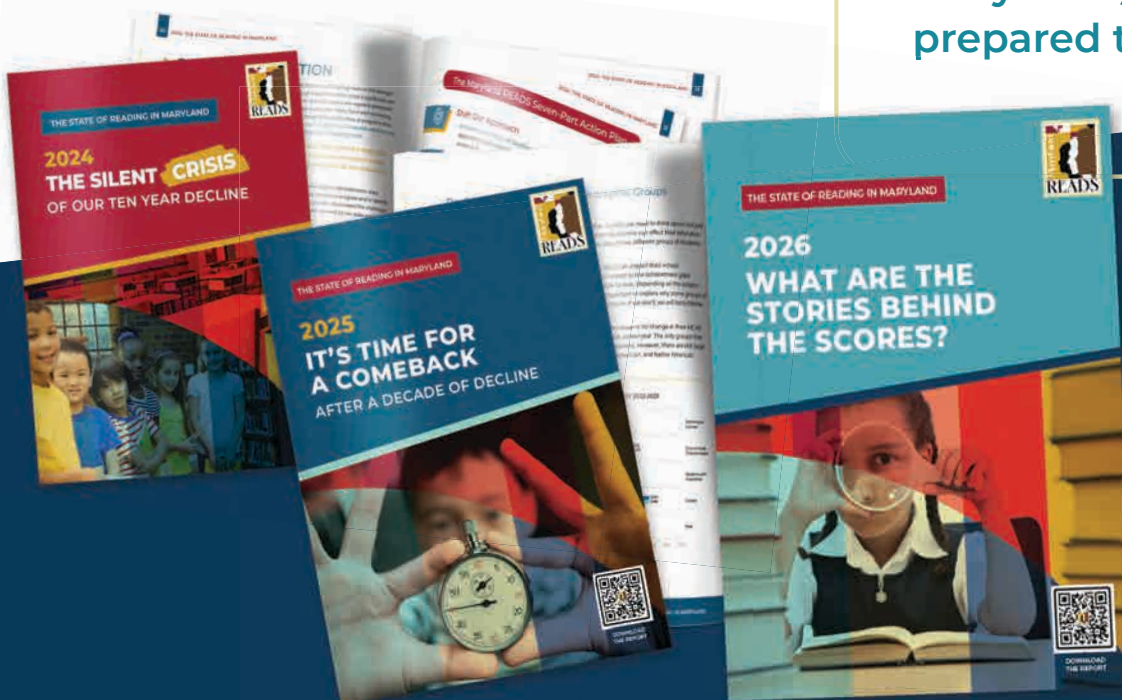
## Expanding our Perspective

When we first released [The State of Reading in Maryland 2024: The Silent Crisis of Our Ten Year Decline](#), our focus was on early literacy and 4th-grade reading outcomes. In early 2025, we published a second report, [The State of Reading in Maryland 2025: Its Time for a Comeback after a Decade of Decline](#), in which we broadened our lens to include both 4th- and 8th-grade reading scores, drawing from National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) data to provide a fuller picture of Maryland's reading proficiency. Our examination of MCAP scores now looks at changes from 2024 to 2025 of 4th-, 8th-, AND 10th-grade students.

With our third edition, we've expanded our analysis once again — this time to include high school students. Two key developments prompted this shift: NAEP's release of 12th-grade reading proficiency data and the Maryland State Department of Education's efforts to develop an adolescent literacy policy. After several years of intense focus on early literacy, we believe this is the right moment to widen the conversation to include middle and high school readers as well.

After all, the ultimate goal of our education system is to ensure that every Maryland graduate is prepared to thrive. This means making sure that they are self-sufficient, capable, and equipped with the knowledge and skills to shape their own future.

The ultimate goal of our education system is to ensure that every Maryland graduate is prepared to thrive.



# Early Literacy in Maryland

In our last report, NAEP data showed that Maryland had finally turned a corner, reversing a decade-long decline in reading proficiency. However, that progress was modest — a reminder that while the trend is moving in the right direction, meaningful recovery will take time and sustained effort.

The 2024 MCAP results mirror NAEP’s findings: **overall, Maryland still has a long way to go** to ensure that all students become proficient readers.

## When we compare 4th-grade reading proficiency between 2024 and 2025, the story is mixed.

- Only seven districts showed improvement, and just two gained five percentage points or more.
- Seventeen districts declined, including four that dropped by more than five percentage points.
- Notably, the state’s highest-performing district saw a decrease, while the lowest-performing district improved — signaling progress in some areas but growing inconsistency overall.

## WHAT ARE THE STORIES BEHIND THE SCORES?

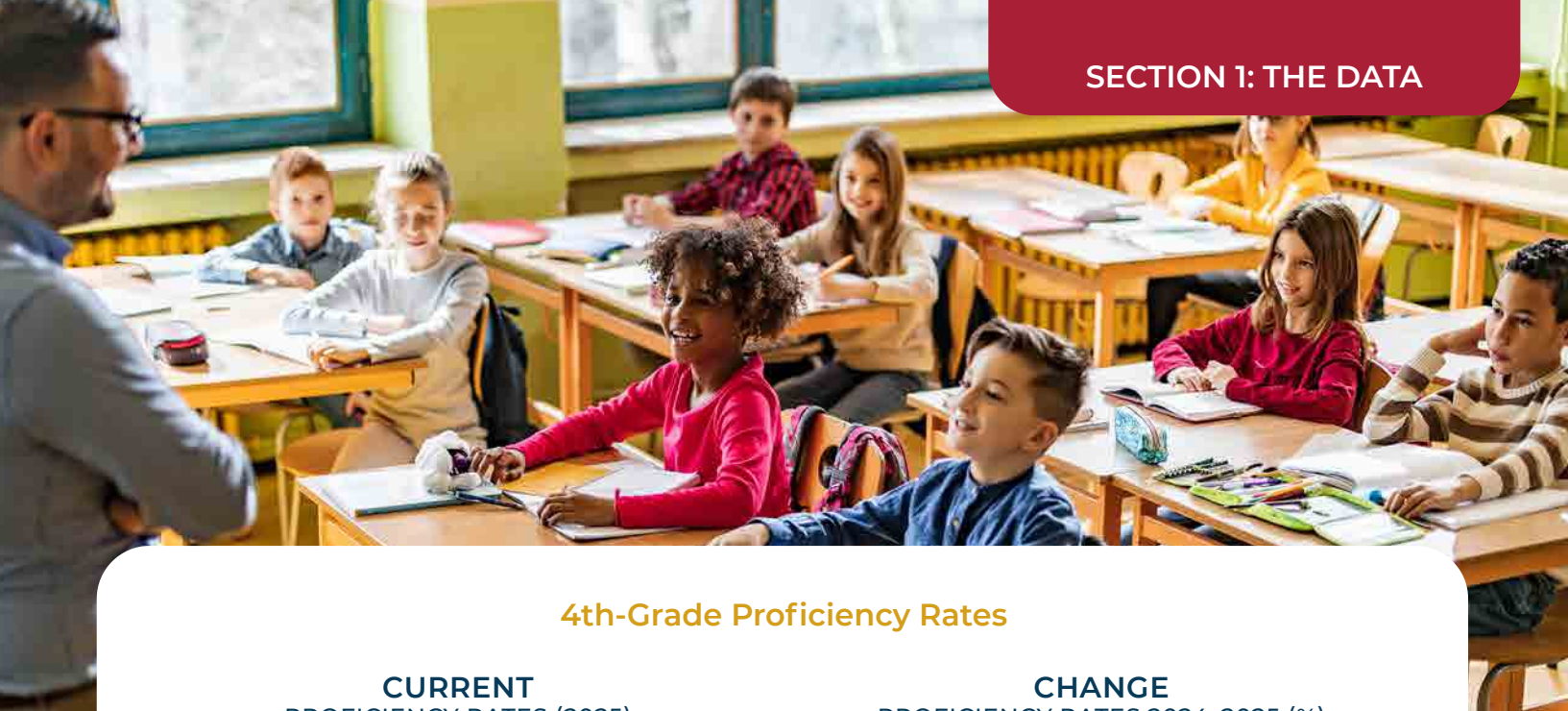
Every number has a story. Behind Maryland’s reading scores are classrooms, teachers, and communities, each with their own challenges and triumphs.

**We’re digging deeper into the data to understand what’s driving change across Maryland.**

**Kent County:** What sparked a 10+ percentage point increase in reading proficiency?

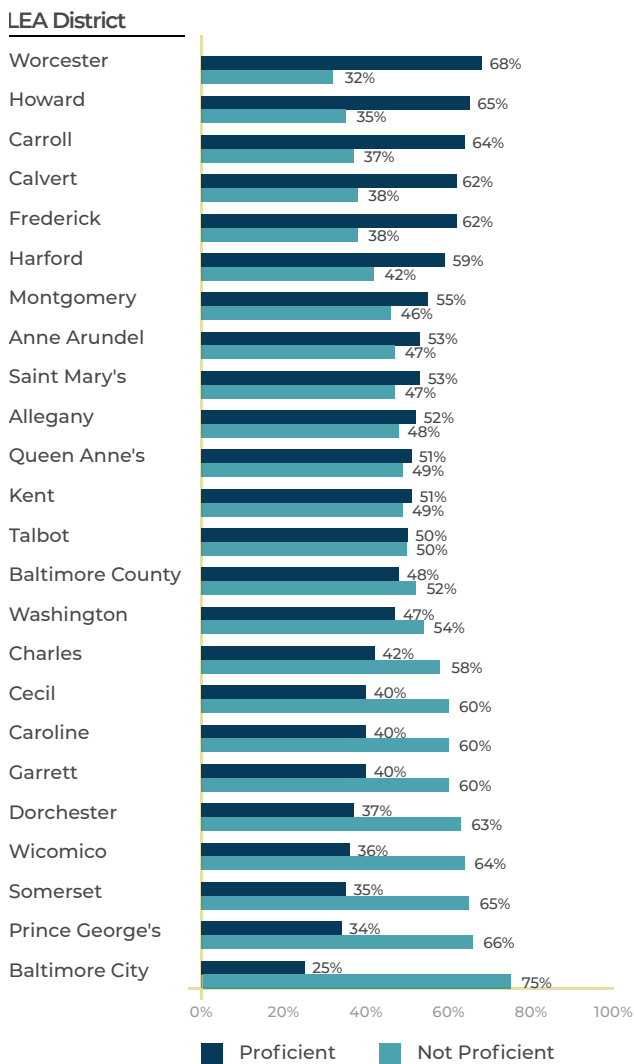
**Queen Anne’s & Garrett Counties:** What factors led to 10+ percentage point declines?

Exploring these local dynamics, and the people and policies behind them, will help illuminate the path forward for Maryland’s reading comeback and build a stronger, more equitable future for Maryland’s children.

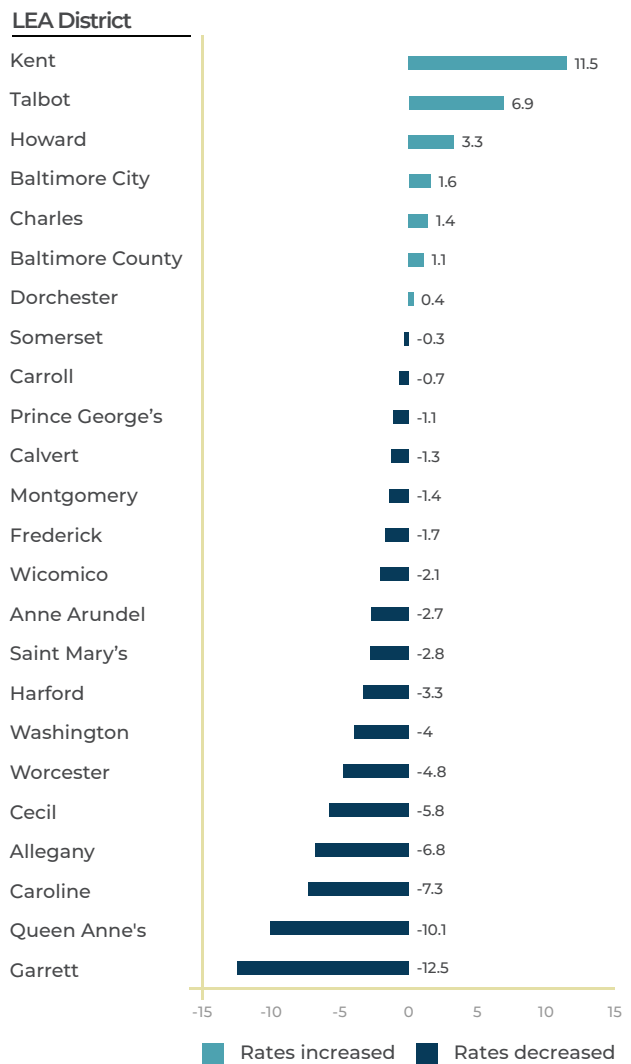


### 4th-Grade Proficiency Rates

**CURRENT**  
PROFICIENCY RATES (2025)



**CHANGE**  
PROFICIENCY RATES 2024-2025 (%)



## Signs of Hope in 8th Grade

Last year, Maryland’s 8th-grade students took the NAEP exam in early 2024, with results released at the start of 2025. The data showed that while reading proficiency rates were still declining, the rate of decline had slowed — an early sign that recent literacy investments may be beginning to take hold.

This year, 8th-grade students took the MCAP exams, and those test scores were released in August. Encouragingly, the number of LEAs showing improvement in 8th-grade reading proficiency was **nearly double** what we saw in the 4th-grade results.

### Here’s what we see when comparing 8th-grade reading proficiency between 2024 and 2025:

- Twelve districts improved, with six gaining five points or more.
- Another twelve declined, but only three by more than five percentage points.
- The state’s top-performing district continued to rise, while the lowest-performing district improved by over ten percentage points — climbing in statewide rankings.

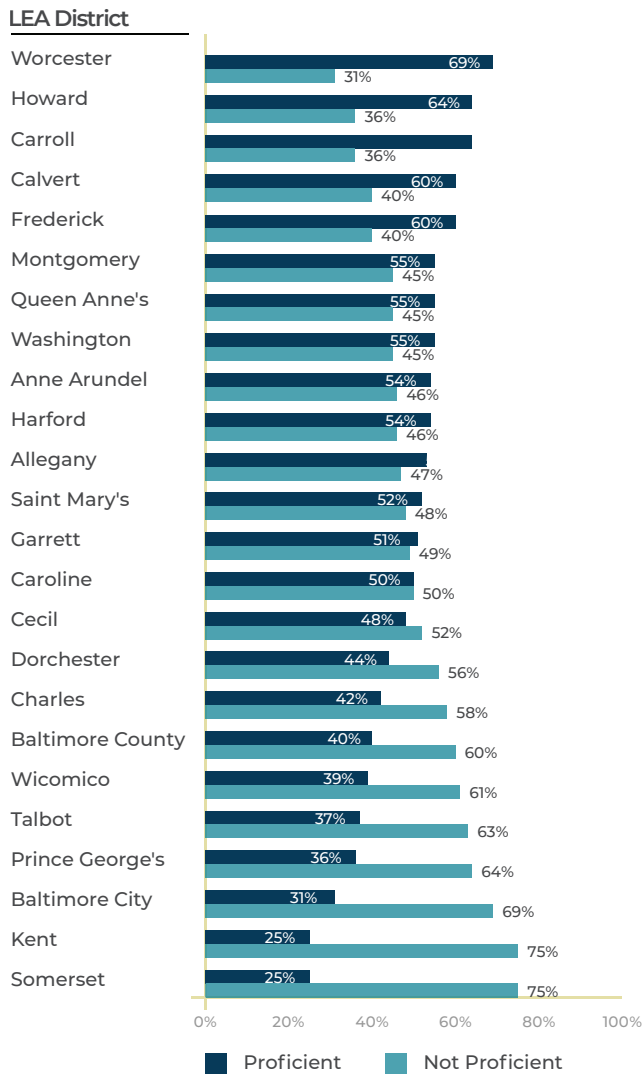
In the spring of 2026 (just a few months away), Maryland’s students will once again sit for the NAEP exam. When the results are released next year, we will learn whether the upward momentum we’re beginning to see in 8th-grade reading on the MCAP assessment is also reflected by NAEP. Will we see evidence that we are at the start of a lasting turnaround?



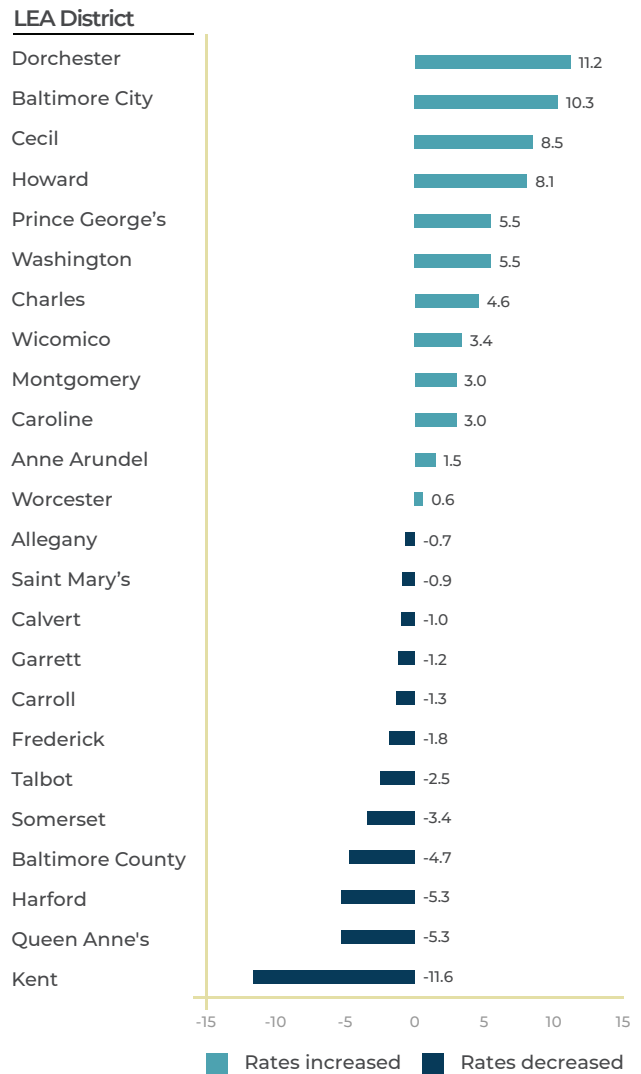
Will this spring’s NAEP test reveal evidence that we are at the start of a lasting turnaround?

### 8th-Grade Proficiency Rates

**CURRENT**  
PROFICIENCY RATES (2025)



**CHANGE**  
PROFICIENCY RATES 2024-2025 (%)





While NAEP 12th grade trends show declines, Maryland's 10th grade MCAP data offers a more encouraging story.

## Mixed Results in High School

Our earlier reports centered on reading proficiency through 8th grade. This year, we've expanded our analysis to include high school students, offering new insights into how well Maryland's learners are prepared for life beyond graduation. The findings draw on two key assessments — Maryland's 10th-grade MCAP and the national 12th-grade NAEP — which together provide a clearer picture of literacy achievement as students near the end of their K-12 journey.

### The Maryland Context

Let's start with the good news first! While national trends show declines, Maryland's MCAP assessment data offers a more encouraging story.

#### Here's what we see when comparing 10th-grade reading proficiency between 2024 and 2025:

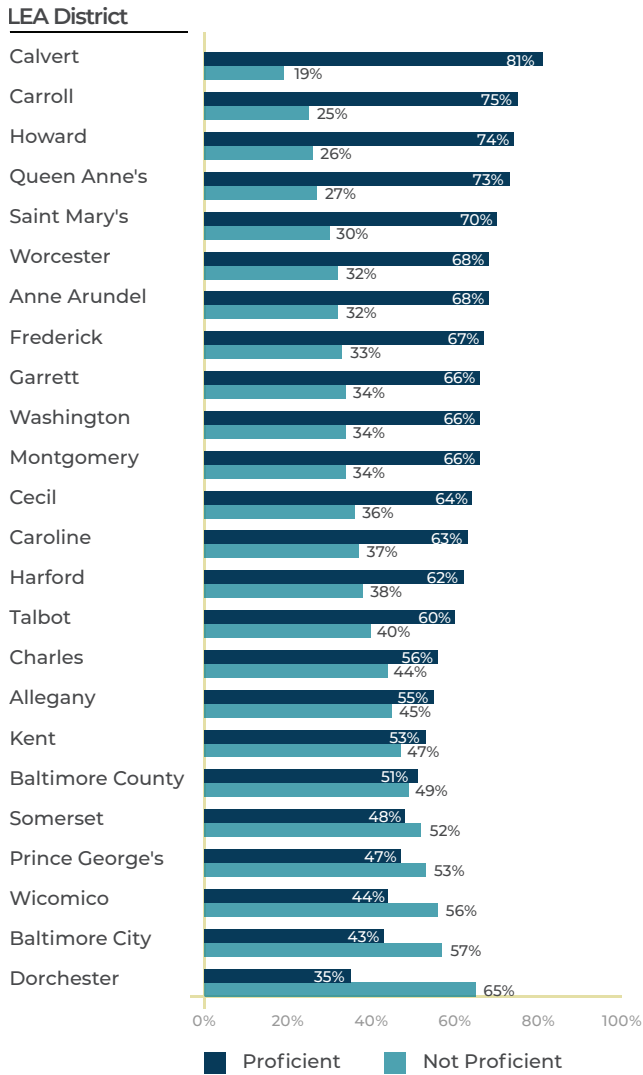
- Twenty LEAs improved 10th-grade reading proficiency from 2024, with nine gaining five points or more.
- Four LEAs declined, and only one dropped by five percentage points.
- The highest-ranked LEA from last year rose another 8.9% points.
- The lowest-ranked LEA improved by 4.3% points.

**“Reading is not just a school skill. It's also essential for success and participation in everyday life.”**

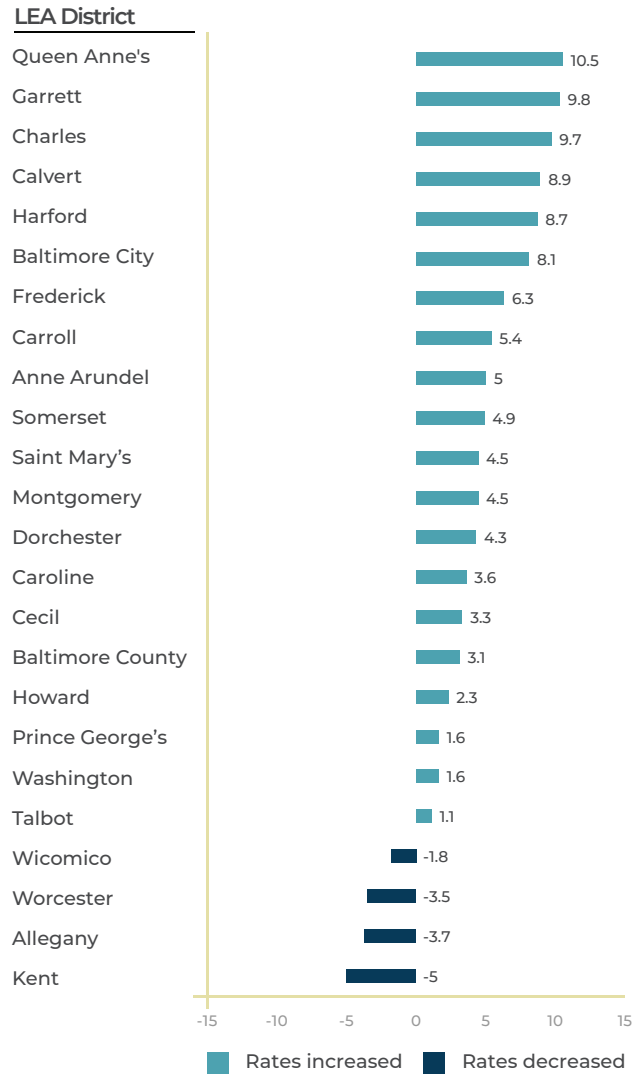
— Mariah, 12th grade student

### 10th-Grade Proficiency Rates

**CURRENT**  
PROFICIENCY RATES (2025)



**CHANGE**  
PROFICIENCY RATES 2024-2025 (%)



# The National Outlook

Nationally, the latest 12th-grade NAEP results, released in 2024, reveal a troubling picture. Unlike earlier grade assessments, these results are reported only at the national level, but the trend is clear:

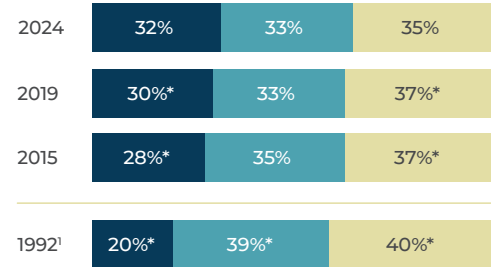
**According to NAEP, reading proficiency among high school students shows a continued decline.**

The average score dropped three points since 2019 and ten points since NAEP’s first reading assessment in 1992.

These results underscore a national challenge of maintaining literacy growth as students move through high school – and underscore why Maryland’s focus on adolescent literacy is both timely and essential.

## Trend in twelfth-grade NAEP reading achievement-level results<sup>2</sup>

Year



Reading achievement-level

- Below NAEP Basic
- NAEP Basic
- At or above NAEP Proficient

\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from 2024.  
<sup>1</sup> Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

## What High School Students Tell Us

The New York Times asked 12th-grade students for their reactions to the NAEP data. Here’s what they had to say:<sup>3</sup>

“When I was in elementary school, we did so much reading, and I thought we would just keep reading more. But it’s the exact opposite. We’ve had to read less and less every year in school, and I think that’s really concerning.”

– Selah

“A.I. is being commonly used by students to skim text, leaving students with answers without the knowledge of how to actually get them...”

– AI

## Interpreting the Difference

The contrast between the NAEP and MCAP findings raises an important question: **How can Maryland’s 10th-grade results be improving when national 12th-grade data show dramatic declines?**

As we engaged with our network, several key questions emerged — ones that helped guide our examination of additional data points.

## Did the Pool of Students Change Over Time?

One hypothesis for the increases across districts in 10th grade proficiency was that changes in **student participation** might have influenced the results. For instance, could absenteeism, dropout rates, or test participation differences have skewed the data, leaving a smaller, higher-performing group of students taking the 10th-grade exam?

To explore this question, we examined participation levels across assessments for 4th, 8th, and 10th grade. **The data did not reveal consistent dramatic reductions** in test counts over time, and the reductions were not specific to LEAs that saw improvements.

- Seven LEAs saw a decline in the number of students tested between 4th and 10th grade.
- Seventeen LEAs saw an increase in participation between 4th and 10th grade.

### Participation Trends by LEA (2019–2025)

LEA District	4th Grade- 2019 Test Count	8th Grade- 2023 Test Count	10th Grade- 2025 Test Count
Allegany	639	590	577
Anne Arundel	6515	6418	6470
Baltimore City	6037	5438	5224
Baltimore County	9086	8082	9090
Calvert	1137	1155	1168
Caroline	414	394	430
Carroll	1763	1892	2011
Cecil	1133	1134	1114
Charles	1942	2109	2217
Dorchester	371	315	381
Frederick	3143	3515	4137
Garrett	257	249	274
Harford	2877	2869	3470
Howard	4339	4335	4556
Kent	138	119	128
Montgomery	12079	11789	12617
Queen Anne's	601	594	616
Somerset	224	199	250
St. Mary's	1333	1275	1305
Talbot	336	329	369
Washington	1641	1563	2625
Wicomico	1227	986	1205
Prince George's	10225	9365	1022
Worcester	499	514	624



## What Exam Was Administered?

Some stakeholders wondered whether the **10th-grade MCAP** was aligned to grade-level expectations. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) confirmed that the 10th grade assessment evaluates student performance against grade-appropriate reading standards — not lower or adjusted benchmarks.

## Did COVID Have a Role?

Finally, we looked at the timing of when the 2025 10th-grade students took their previous exams, particularly in relationship to the COVID-19 school disruptions. In this case, we are reviewing students over time who progressed from 4th- to 8th- to 10-grade. This offers critical context for interpreting performance trends:

- In 4th grade (Spring 2019), students' early literacy instruction occurred before COVID-19 disruptions.
- In 8th grade (Spring 2023), they had one full year of post-COVID instruction as schools returned to “normal.”
- By 10th grade (Spring 2025), they had experienced three consecutive years of stable, in-person learning.

This progression may help explain the upward trend in 10th-grade proficiency. And, perhaps it's possible that the 12th-grade NAEP data reflected the end of a downward trend?

Conversely, today's 4th graders (tested in 2025) began school during the pandemic, experiencing critical disruptions in kindergarten and 1st grade — a period foundational for developing early literacy skills.

Could this be the reason for the declines in 4th-grade proficiency? If the effects of this early disruption persist, might this be a sign of things to come?

## WHAT ARE THE STORIES BEHIND THE SCORES?

Maryland's reading results show both progress and disparity.

Garrett and Queen Anne's Counties saw sharp 4th-grade declines but strong 10th-grade gains.

Understanding these stories is key to Maryland's reading comeback and to ensuring progress for every student.

**These trends raise key questions:**

- What's driving the rebound in high school reading?
- Why are early-grade students still struggling?
- How do teaching and community factors shape outcomes?

# Performance Among Demographic Groups of Students

Because Maryland is one of the most diverse states in the country, we need to think about not just where students live, but also how race, ethnicity, and family income can affect their education. MCAP data gives us important information about how different groups of students are doing.

Research shows that a student's socioeconomic status can impact their school performance. Studies<sup>4</sup> have found that these factors are related to the achievement gaps between Black and White students (which range from 34% to 64%, depending on the subject and grade).

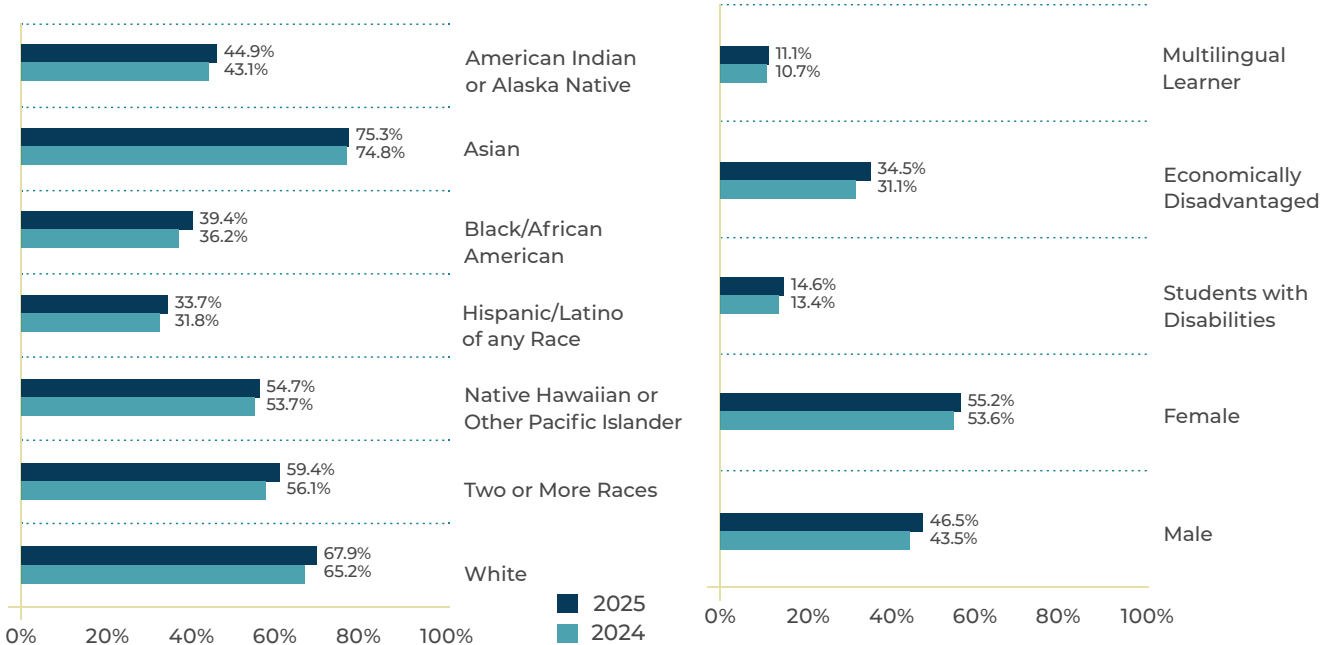
While many factors affect reading skills, it's important to explore why some groups of students have lower reading scores and find ways to help them. If we don't, we might not get the most out of our efforts to improve reading education.

**Until every student can read proficiently, Maryland's work isn't finished. Closing the gaps means lifting every child, in every community.**



According to the MSDE, this year all student groups saw a small increase in their MCAP ELA scores for the 2024-2025 school year. Unlike In 2023-2024, where Asian, Hispanic/Latino, and multilingual learners saw a decline, these groups saw a slight increase in 2024-2025. And, according to MSDE, almost all race/ethnicity groups have improved since 2022. The exceptions are Asian students who held steady at a 75% proficiency rate.

**ELA Proficiency by Student Group, SY 2024-2025 Compared to SY 2023-2024**



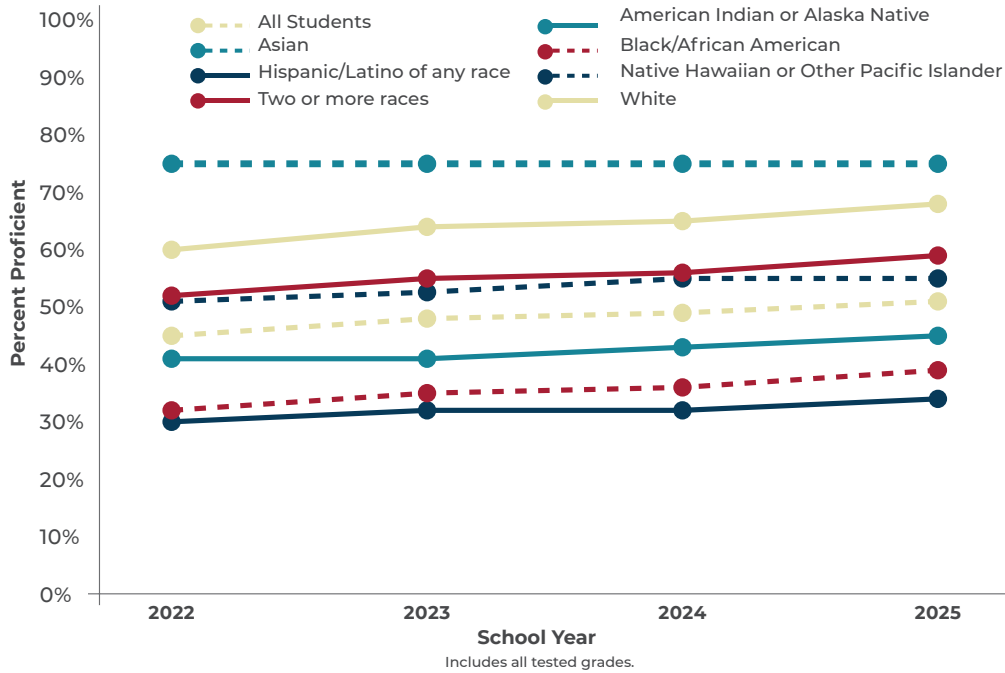
**DID YOU KNOW?**

Maryland exempts “recently arrived” Multilingual Learners (MLs) from one administration of its reading assessment during the first year of enrollment in U.S. schools, per Federal law. Multilingual learners who score a 4.5 or higher on the WIDA Access exam can exit ML status. Reclassified students are those that exited ML status in the last two years.

While improvements among student groups are generally positive, the gains were not dramatic, and there are still large gaps in proficiency between Hispanic/Latino, Black/African American, and Native American students compared to White and Asian students.

### Trends in ELA Proficiency by Race/Ethnicity<sup>5</sup>

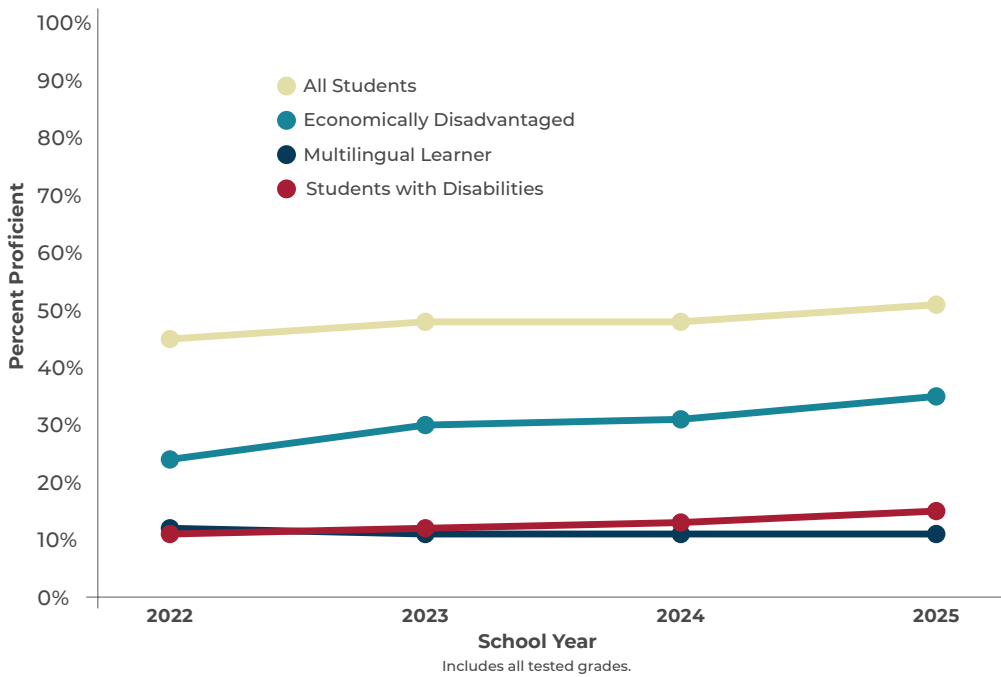
ELA proficiency increased across almost all race/ethnicity groups since 2022 but gaps remain.



Among students living in poverty, proficiency levels vary predictably: students in communities with the lowest poverty rates achieve the highest proficiency, while those in communities with the highest poverty rates perform the lowest. However, the rate of improvement in proficiency was identical for both groups, suggesting that progress, while positive, has done little to close proficiency gaps between different socioeconomic groups.

### Trends in ELA Proficiency by Student Group<sup>6</sup>

ELA proficiency has increased across most student groups since 2022.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

Overall, there was no significant relationship between school poverty and change in ELA achievement in 2024-2025. Schools with higher proportions of economically disadvantaged students were not more or less likely to increase ELA proficiency than schools with lower proportions of economically disadvantaged students.

# Reading Proficiency in Community Schools

Community schools were created to be more than just educational spaces — they are designed to be the heart of a community. These schools bring together families, educators, and local partners to remove barriers to learning and ensure that every child has the support they need to thrive.

Maryland's investment in this model began with legislation passed in 2019 that formally codified community schools in state law. The [Blueprint for Maryland's Future](#) built on that foundation, expanding and sustaining the vision for high-quality community schools that meet critical needs. Today, Maryland is home to **617 community schools**, each with the potential to serve as a powerful engine for student success.<sup>7</sup>

While the primary focus of community schools is to provide wraparound services that address the diverse needs of children and families, Maryland READS believes one of the clearest indicators of success should be **improvement in reading proficiency**. MSDE's data show that, on average, community schools experienced smaller gains in proficiency than other schools — but the numbers only tell part of the story.

## Community Schools<sup>8</sup>

Community schools on average had lower increases in proficiency than other schools since 2023.

Community Schools' MCAP Proficiency by Identification Year

Identification Year (School count) (Concentration of poverty eligibility threshold)	ELA				Math			
	2023	2024	2025	Two-Year Change (percentage points)	2023	2024	2025	Two-Year Change (percentage points)
FY 2020 (173) (At least 80%)	22.3%	22.5%	24.8%	<b>2.5</b>	7.4%	8.2%	10.6%	<b>3.2</b>
FY 2021 (64) (At least 75%)	27.9%	26.2%	28.7%	<b>0.8</b>	11.2%	11.3%	13.6%	<b>2.3</b>
FY 2022 (45) (At least 70%)	28.0%	28.2%	30.5%	<b>2.5</b>	12.6%	12.5%	14.5%	<b>1.8</b>
FY 2023 (52) (At least 65%)	29.4%	28.9%	31.8%	<b>2.4</b>	10.6%	10.9%	12.5%	<b>1.9</b>
FY 2024 (99) (At least 60%)	36.9%	37.6%	39.6%	<b>2.7</b>	13.1%	13.9%	15.9%	<b>2.8</b>
FY 2025 (161) (At least 55%)	37.7%	38.5%	40.9%	<b>3.2</b>	15.0%	14.9%	17.8%	<b>2.8</b>
<b>Not Community Schools (723)</b>	59.2%	60.0%	62.5%	<b>3.3</b>	31.4%	32.5%	35.2%	<b>3.7</b>

Note: Community schools identified in FY 2024 and FY 2025 include schools that do not have at least one year of implementation. The "Not Community Schools" category includes any school never identified as such.

A closer look at the data reveals a more complex picture. Just as we saw in the LEA-level results, outcomes vary widely from one community school to another. Some schools achieved significant gains in reading proficiency, while others saw declines. These differences raise important questions about what's working, what's not, and why.

- What are the stories behind the scores?
- How are the community schools that are realizing gains using their resources and partnerships to drive academic progress?
- What conditions exist in schools where proficiency rates have declined that might be creating barriers to growth?

Exploring these questions will be critical to understanding how Maryland's community schools can continue to evolve — not only as centers of support, but as catalysts for lasting improvements in literacy and learning.

**A closer look at the data reveals a more complex picture about that changes that are occurring in community schools.**



# Every Data Point is a Child

According to the 2025 MCAP Data, 32,895 4th-grade students, 33,183 8th-grade students, and 28,730 10th-grade students cannot read proficiently.

**There are 94,788 children in just three grades combined that can not read proficiently in Maryland!**

## 4th-Grade

Percent and Number of Non-proficient Students

LEA District Highest to Lowest Proficiency Rates	Non-proficient (%)	Number of Students not Proficient
Worcester	32.1	142
Howard	34.9	1461
Carroll	36.5	730
Calvert	37.8	408
Frederick	38.1	1325
Harford	41.5	1158
Montgomery	45.5	5081
Anne Arundel	46.8	2901
Saint Mary's	46.8	602
Allegany	48.3	266
Queen Anne's	48.7	259
Kent	48.7	56
Talbot	50.0	138
Baltimore County	51.7	4176
Washington	53.5	858
Charles	58.4	1118
Cecil	59.6	608
Caroline	59.7	236
Garrett	60.2	142
Dorchester	62.6	191
Wicomico	64.0	762
Somerset	64.6	135
Prince George's	65.7	6072
Baltimore City	74.7	4070

## 8th-Grade

Percent and Number of Non-proficient Students

LEA District Highest to Lowest Proficiency Rates	Non-proficient (%)	Number of Students not Proficient
Worcester	31.1	161
Howard	35.9	1608
Carroll	36.3	702
Calvert	39.7	483
Frederick	40.3	1448
Montgomery	44.6	5147
Queen Anne's	44.7	263
Washington	45.0	737
Anne Arundel	45.8	2844
Harford	46.5	1302
Allegany	46.9	271
Saint Mary's	47.7	588
Garrett	49.4	118
Caroline	50.3	198
Cecil	52.0	555
Dorchester	55.9	162
Charles	58.5	1179
Baltimore County	60.2	4576
Wicomico	60.8	591
Talbot	63.3	183
Prince George's	64.1	6091
Baltimore City	69.3	3748
Kent	75.0	84
Somerset	75.0	144

## 10th-Grade

Percent and Number of Non-proficient Students

LEA District Highest to Lowest Proficiency Rates	Non-proficient (%)	Number of Students not Proficient
Calvert	19.0	222
Carroll	24.6	495
Howard	25.8	1175
Queen Anne's	26.9	166
Saint Mary's	29.9	390
Worcester	31.7	198
Anne Arundel	31.8	2057
Frederick	33.1	1368
Garrett	33.9	93
Washington	34.4	904
Montgomery	34.5	4358
Cecil	35.9	400
Caroline	36.7	158
Harford	37.6	1306
Talbot	40.1	148
Charles	44.5	987
Allegany	45.2	261
Kent	46.9	60
Baltimore County	49.4	4489
Somerset	52.4	131
Prince George's	53.3	5444
Wicomico	55.8	672
Baltimore City	57.4	3000
Dorchester	65.1	248



The overuse of technology in classrooms can interfere with the deep reading and comprehension skills students need to build.

## Other Critical Factors Impacting Reading Proficiency

Improving reading proficiency depends on ensuring that every child receives high-quality instruction grounded in the Science of Reading. One of the most direct ways to improve outcomes is by equipping classroom teachers with the knowledge and tools to deliver explicit, systematic instruction in foundational reading skills. Yet, persistent challenges in **teacher preparation** may be contributing to Maryland's reading crisis.

**In 2024, 10 of 15 Maryland teacher-preparation programs reviewed received failing marks for not adequately preparing teachers to teach reading.<sup>3</sup>**

Other factors that significantly influence reading development include **chronic absenteeism**, which limits instructional time for students, and the **overuse of technology** in classrooms, which can interfere with the deep reading and comprehension skills students need to build.

## Teacher Preparation Programs

In earlier reports, Maryland READS highlighted findings from the **National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ)** showing that **10 of 15 Maryland teacher-preparation programs** they reviewed received failing marks for not adequately preparing teachers to teach reading.<sup>9</sup> In a subsequent evaluation, NCTQ assigned Maryland an overall rating of **“weak”** for its limited progress in ensuring teacher-training programs effectively teach the Science of Reading.<sup>10</sup>

While no recent research has been published to evaluate how programs have responded to these findings, two organizations offer a lens for identifying programs that align with rigorous national standards for evidence-based reading instruction.

The Academic Language Therapy Association (ALTA) recognizes higher-education programs that prepare Academic Language Therapists and Practitioners using structured-literacy principles. As of this writing, no Maryland colleges or universities appear on ALTA’s list of recognized programs.<sup>11</sup> However, the Atlantic Seaboard Education Center, based in Prince George’s County, is the only ALTA-accredited Training Center we could identify in our state.

In contrast, Morgan State University recently achieved a significant milestone. This fall, its undergraduate teacher preparation program became the first in Maryland – and the first at an HBCU nationwide – to earn accreditation from the International Dyslexia Association (IDA). This accreditation reflects alignment with IDA’s Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading, marking a promising step toward strengthening Maryland’s teacher-training pipeline in reading instruction.<sup>12</sup>

**Morgan State University became the first HBCU and Maryland institution accredited by the International Dyslexia Association — a milestone for teacher preparation in reading.**





Chronic absenteeism is when students miss at least 10%, or usually about 18 days of school per year.

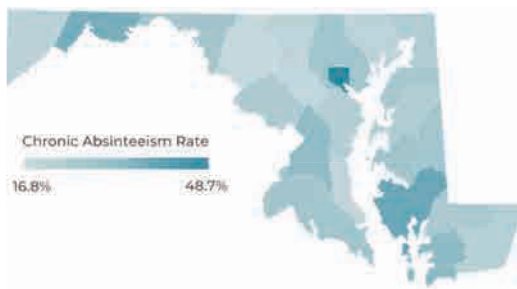
## Chronic Absenteeism and Student Attendance

When students miss school, they are not learning. Chronic absenteeism is when students miss at least 10%, or usually about 18 days of school per year.

While chronic absenteeism rates have been declining since 2022, there is more work to do to reach pre-pandemic levels.

### Maryland Chronic Absenteeism<sup>13</sup>

Chronic absenteeism in Maryland counties ranges from 16.8% to 48.7%.



### Chronic Absenteeism<sup>14</sup>

About 27% of Maryland students were chronically absent in 2024.

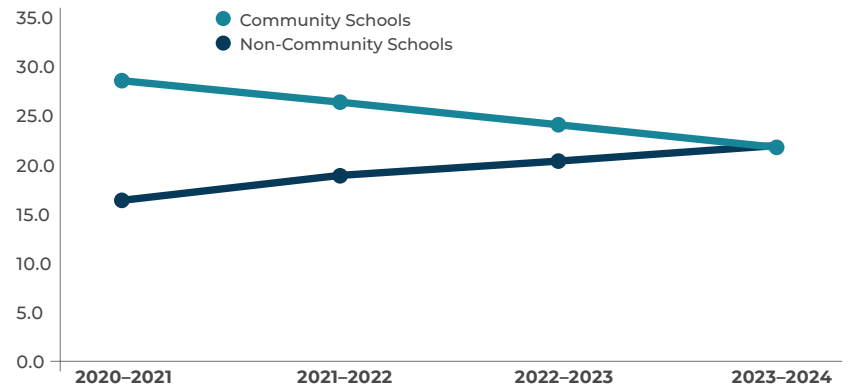


Reading proficiency is often considered a **lagging indicator** — one of the last measures to show improvement within an educational improvement cycle. By contrast, **leading indicators** signal that systemic changes are taking hold and that progress is being made toward long-term goals in student achievement.

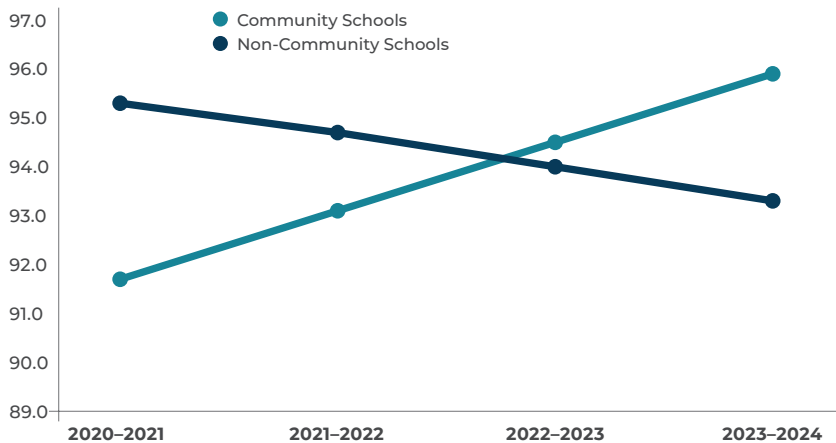
One encouraging leading indicator comes from the effort to reduce **chronic absenteeism**. A recent research brief from the [Maryland Center for Community Schools](#)<sup>15</sup> highlights **meaningful progress** in improving student attendance across Maryland's community schools.

The data tell a promising story: while attendance rates in non-community schools have declined, attendance in community schools has steadily increased. At the same time, chronic absenteeism in community schools has fallen significantly — to the point where **community schools and non-community schools now share the same rate of chronic absenteeism.**

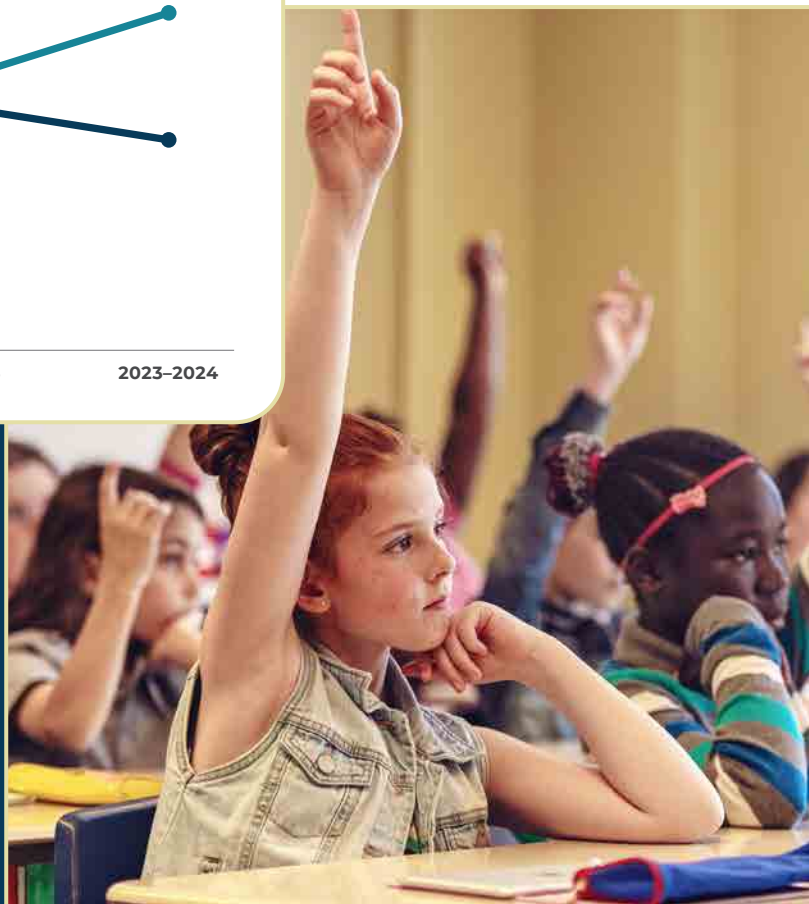
### Chronic Absenteeism



### Average Daily Attendance



While attendance rates in non-community schools have declined, attendance in community schools has steadily increased.



# The Overuse of Screen Time

In our previous report, we began exploring what we call the **digital dilemma** — the growing body of evidence showing how digital devices are shaping, and in some cases hindering, the development of children’s reading and critical-thinking skills. Through our collaboration with **Dr. Maryanne Wolf** and the **Albert Shanker Institute**, Maryland READS began examining how the shift from print to screens is influencing students’ ability to process language, sustain attention, and build comprehension.

New research by Dr. Tzipi Horowitz-Kraus, Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and a Research Scientist in the Department of Neuropsychology at Kennedy Krieger as well as Associate Professor in the Department of Education in Science and Technology - TechnionIsraeli Institute of Technology offers compelling insights into this issue. Her studies reveal that the **format of reading** — whether from a book or a screen — significantly affects **brain-to-brain synchronization** between parents and children during shared reading.

## More Reactions from High School Students

Students who responded to the New York Times attributed the overuse of screen time, introduced at an early age and continuing through schools, as a major factor in their loss of focus and interest in reading.<sup>17</sup> We should listen to what they are telling us.

“I think the decrease in these reading skills says a lot about how our generation is changing. Many of us have grown up surrounded by screens, and it’s hard to stay focused on long texts when everyone online moves so fast.”

— Julia

“I believe that the factor that has most significantly impacted student learning is the increasing use of screens and technology in educational settings.”

— Radha



Digital devices are shaping, and in some cases hindering, the development of children’s reading and critical-thinking skills.

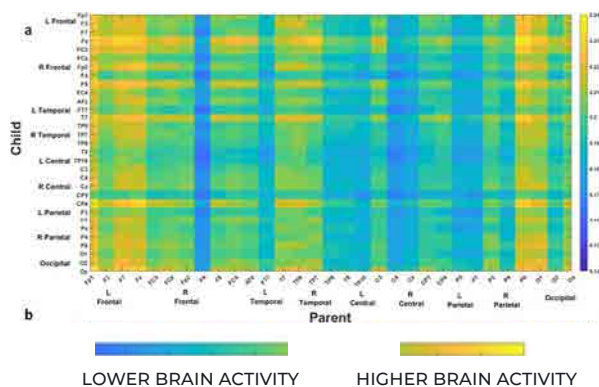
The images below illustrate these differences.<sup>16</sup> The yellow and green areas represent regions of high brain synchronization between the parent and the child. As shown, a child's brain **is more engaged and in sync** with the adult (representing a higher joint attention) when reading a physical book together than when reading from a digital device (tablet).

The research makes clear that reading printed materials together appears to relate to a greater brain-to-brain synchronization. **Bottom line: A printed book rather than tablet-based reading is preferred for young children.**

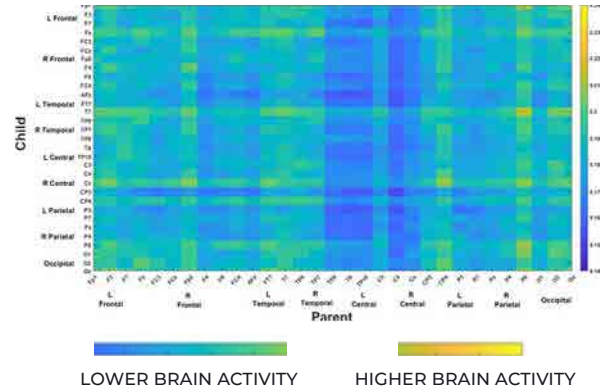
## A printed book rather than tablet-based reading is preferred for young children.

This growing body of evidence underscores an urgent question for educators and policymakers: how can schools strike the right balance between technology use and the deep, focused reading experiences that build the neural foundation for comprehension, empathy, and critical thought?

### Book-based Dialogue



### Tablet-based Dialogue



# Is Your School Beating the Odds in Reading?

## A Bright Spots Analysis

As poverty rates rise, reading proficiency rates tend to fall. But poverty is not destiny, and some schools and districts hugely outperform what might be expected of them based solely on which students they serve.

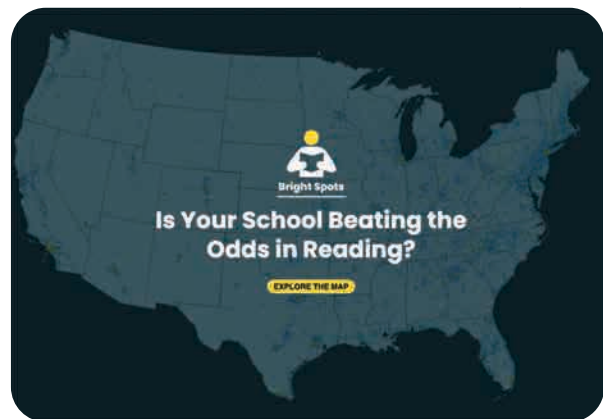
Bright Spots calculated each state's expected reading proficiency rate, based on its local poverty rate, and compared that to its actual third grade reading scores. This methodology helped us identify schools that are beating the odds and successfully teaching kids to read.

### Where did the Data Come From?

The data for this project come from two sources. Spring 2024 third-grade reading scores were downloaded from Zelma.ai, an initiative from ParentData and Brown University to compile state test scores and make them publicly available. The 2023-24 poverty data comes from the Common Core of Data from the National Center for Education Statistics. These numbers are reported by states to the federal government, but they may look different than the measures that states or districts use for their own purposes.

### How was poverty measured?

States use and report different metrics, so they looked at both free- and reduced-price lunch rates and the actual number of students who qualify, based on their family's participation in one or more means-tested federal relief programs. Because they were looking for positive outliers, they gave schools the benefit of the doubt and took the higher of these two figures.



**Find out how your school is doing!**

**This interactive map has every elementary school in Maryland. Only the yellow dots are the schools designated as “Bright Spots”.**

# System of Support

## What Leaders are Doing in Response to the Reading Crisis

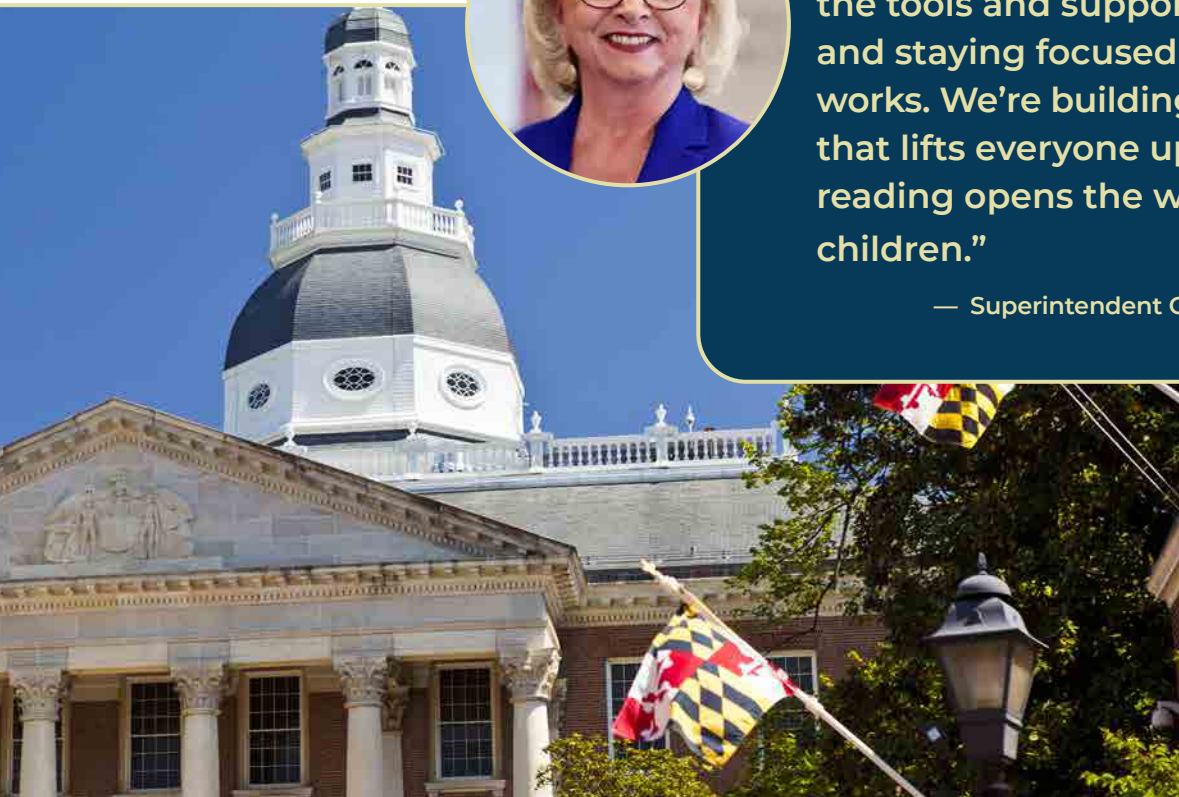
We know we are in the midst of a reading crisis and it will take time to achieve dramatic changes. As we discussed in Section One of this report with respect to Community Schools, leading indicators help us monitor progress towards our ultimate goal. In this section, we share the findings of our efforts to monitor the actions at the state level that can be considered “leading indicators”. They show us the progress that is being made to build a system of support that will ultimately lead to consistent improvement in reading proficiency rates in all Maryland counties.

Join our exploration of the steps Maryland is taking to improve reading instruction, as well as what Maryland READS and local communities are doing to create a supportive environment that ensures every student has the opportunity to become a skilled reader.



“Every child can learn to read — and it’s our job to make sure they do. That means giving teachers the tools and support they need, and staying focused on what works. We’re building a system that lifts everyone up because reading opens the world to all children.”

— Superintendent Carey M. Wright, Ed.D.



# STATE ACTIONS

## to Build Systems of Support

### MAR

- Amendments to [COMAR 13A.03.08 Students at Risk for Reading Difficulties](#)
- MSDE hosts [elementary literacy coaching webinar #2](#)

### MAY

- Maryland Legislature passes and Governor signs [Absenteeism Task Force](#)
- MSDE hosts [elementary literacy coaching webinar #4](#)

MONTH

2

MONTH

3

MONTH

4

MONTH

5

MONTH

6

MSDE [Read and Lead Grant Competition](#)

MSDE lists [job posting for 2 State Literacy Coaches](#)

MSDE hosts [elementary literacy coaching webinar #1](#)

### FEB

MSDE announces [2 LEA chronic absenteeism workshops](#)

MSDE releases [Spring Attendance: Early Action Toolkit](#)

MSDE provides guidance on [promotion/retention policy](#)

MSDE hosts [elementary literacy coaching webinar #3](#)

Maryland Legislature creates [state coaching program](#) but does not fund

### APR

## JUL

College and Career Readiness Standards ELA updated

Literacy Policy Implementation Update (information) (PreK-3)

MSDE awards Read and Lead grants to 15 LEAs

Maryland Legislature authorized the Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools (Chapter 243, Acts of 2025).

## SEP

Deadline for LEA Promotion/Retention Policies

AIB/MSDE Submit report on Science of Reading (SoR) and Maryland's PreK-3 Comprehensive Literacy Policy

MSDE secures funding for county level coaching pilot

MSDE share 2026 legislative priorities - includes coaching

MONTH

7

MONTH

8

MONTH

9

MONTH

10

### MCAP Results

MSDE Releases a Welcome Back to School Toolkit to focus on a culture of attendance

MSDE launches Adolescent Literacy Policy Workgroups

MSDE announces plan to update MCAP

Amendments adopted COMAR 13A.05.07 Programs for English Learners

Amendment adopted COMAR 13A.03.07 Seal of Biliteracy

New regulation adopted COMAR 13A.01.10 Language Access

MSDE Launches Elementary Coaching Cohort

Maryland Library Agency Host Dyslexia Summit

## OCT

## AUG

Scan to visit MD READS website.



# THE STATE OF READING IN MARYLAND

## State Action Details

- **FEBRUARY** .....
  - [Read and Lead Grant Competition](#): MSDE launches a five-year, \$38 million grant program to strengthen statewide literacy efforts. At least 15% of funds must go to birth-5, 40% to K-5, and 40% to K-12.
  - [State-Level Literacy Coaches Positions](#): MSDE seeks two state literacy coaches to align local efforts with the Comprehensive Literacy Plan.
  - [Literacy Coaching Webinar #1](#): MSDE hosts “Understanding the Core Competencies of Coaching,” the first of four literacy coaching webinars.
- **MARCH** .....
  - [Proposed Code of Maryland Regulations \(COMAR\) Amendments \(13A.03.08\)](#): Expands reading screening to all K-3 students; requires Reading Improvement Plans, family partnerships, and supplemental instruction aligned with the PK-3 Literacy Policy.
  - [MSDE Literacy Coaching Webinar #2](#): Topic – “Championing the Literacy Coach Model.”
- **APRIL** .....
  - [Chronic Absenteeism Workshops](#): MSDE holds two workshops on reducing “spring slide” attendance drops and supporting students nearing chronic absenteeism.
  - [Spring Attendance — Early Action Toolkit, Released by MSDE and Attendance Works](#): Introduces a four-step approach to reduce chronic absences — strengthen attendance teams, address spring slide, reach at-risk students, and remove attendance barriers.
  - [Guidance on LEA Promotion Policies](#): MSDE outlines required components for LEA draft policies, including 3rd-4th grade promotion criteria, exemption processes, and parent engagement steps (drafts due Sept. 1).
  - [MSDE Literacy Coaching Webinar #3](#): Topic – “Creating Structures of Support.”
  - [State Coaching Program](#): The legislature authorizes a new coaching program under the Academic Excellence Program in SB429/HB504, but leaves it unfunded. AIB/MSDE submit joint report to the legislature.
- **MAY** .....
  - [Attendance & Chronic Absenteeism Task Force](#): Enacted and signed by Governor Wes Moore in HB879 to study absenteeism and report recommendations by Dec. 31, 2025.
  - [Literacy Coaching Webinar #4](#): Topic – “Leveraging Data and Effective Feedback.”

## JULY

**ELA Standards Update:** MSDE revises Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards, including preK literacy standards, for clarity, ease of use, and validity.

**PreK–3 Literacy Policy Update:** State Board briefed on coaching, Science of Reading AIM courses, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), and family engagement supports.

**Read and Lead Grant Awards:** \$38 million awarded to 15 LEAs for 21 projects advancing coaching, MTSS, high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), professional learning, structured literacy, and/or gifted and talented (GT) programming.

**Attendance Task Force Launch:** Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism takes effect (1.5-year duration).

## AUGUST

**MCAP 2024–25 Results:** State ELA proficiency rises slightly to 50.8%; all grades up except 4th grade (48.4%, down 0.9%).

**Welcome Back to School Toolkit:** MSDE shares an attendance framework focusing on communication, data, supports, and welcome activities.

**MSDE Adolescent Literacy Policy Workgroup:** Convenings begin to develop a draft policy.

**MCAP Update Announcement:** MSDE's [Assessment and Accountability Technical Advisory Council recommends revisions to the MCAP](#) following four full administrations since 2021–22. In addition, the [AIB and MSDE](#) include “students attending Community Schools” as part of the students groups under the aligned metrics to measure progress.

COMAR Updates:

- **13A.05.07 Programs for English Learners:** Terminology updated to “multilingual learners.”
- **13A.03.07 Seal of Biliteracy:** Clarifies eligibility for students demonstrating language proficiency.
- **13A.01.10 Language Access (New):** Requires LEAs to adopt “language access plans” ensuring interpretation and translation services for covered and non-covered languages.

## SEPTEMBER

**LEA Promotion Policy Deadline:** September 1, 2025.

**Science of Reading Report to the General Assembly:** MSDE and Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) submit joint report on implementation and [preK–3 literacy](#) progress.

**Pilot Funding:** MSDE receives grant for an LEA-level literacy coaching pilot.

**MSDE announces 2026 legislative priorities** that includes funding the instructional program.

## OCTOBER

**Elementary Coaching Cohort:** MSDE initiates statewide coaching cohort for elementary literacy leaders.

**2025 Dyslexia Summit:** The Maryland Library Agency hosts a statewide summit with live-streamed presentations, showcases, and discussions.

# Thriving Reading Ecosystems

The READ Strong Network is a statewide, county-based effort to unite our communities around a common goal of improving reading proficiency for all students.

While our schools and teachers have the primary job of instructing our children through the Science of Reading, building thriving reading ecosystems will reinforce the work happening in the classroom. We envision a network of thriving reading ecosystems where reading becomes not just a skill but a value that the entire community nurtures.



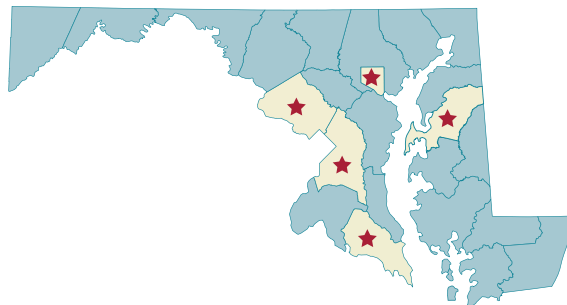
Montgomery County is working with Delegate Jared Solomon to develop a reading challenge for students during school breaks. The team is researching in and out of school reading challenges as well as strategies to engage parents to encourage students to read books when they are on school breaks.



In St. Mary's County, our newest team is launching a comprehensive literacy initiative to advance foundational reading skills, language comprehension, and reading motivation through programs like Reading Champs, tutoring with students in teacher preparation programs, after school clubs, and parent training.



Baltimore City's team is working to reach parents who have typically not been engaged in reading with their children. Their goal is to create Education Congregations and establish projects that include Book Nooks, a communications campaign to motivate and support parents, and creating a network of family librarians.



Queen Anne's County continues to refine its landscape scan that identifies existing reading resources such as the free BrainFuse tutoring program available through their local library. They seek to promote existing reading programs as research effective elements of community-led tutoring programs.



In Prince George's County, our Strong Readers partner narrowed their focus to work with the local community that surrounds Thomas Stone Elementary School. They are bringing together families through a community book club that fosters communication, confidence, and connection by sharing stories and encouraging family literacy.

# Call to Action

## While Maryland has made important strides, the work is far from over.

With 4th-grade students' reading proficiency rates in Maryland ranging from 25% to 68% across LEAs, it's clear that we must do more.

This is a pivotal moment — sitting on the sidelines is no longer an option. Now is the time for all of us to step forward, take action, and fully commit to the work ahead. We must build on the foundation we've established and push even harder to ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed.

Our children's futures depend on what we do today. Following are specific things we must do as we continue this journey together and make a lasting impact on children's lives.

**Our children's futures  
depend on the actions  
we take now!**



# IMPROVE INSTRUCTION

## Understand Your Data

Educate yourself about your county's reading proficiency scores. MSDE provides [Public School Report Cards](#) each year that detail reading proficiency rates at the state, district, and school level. Maryland READS further analyzes that data to help local leaders and community members understand if school districts are improving reading instruction at critical grade levels over time.

## Train Teachers

In May 2024, MSDE received a \$6.8 million grant from the IBIS Group to fund AIM Pathways professional learning opportunities and SUNY New Paltz SOR micro-credentials. These courses have been available to educators for just over one year. Yet, there are still counties where educators have not taken advantage of these opportunities. We challenge teachers and administrators **IN EVERY COUNTY** to complete the AIM Pathways courses along with the SUNY New Paltz micro-credential.

**Higher education programs must take greater responsibility for strengthening teacher preparation programs.**

## Fund MSDE's Statewide Coaching Model

Coaching helps ensure that the training teachers receive translates into impact in the classroom and, ultimately, improved proficiency rates. In 2025, the Maryland Legislature created a statewide coaching program but did not fund it. It's time for Maryland's leaders to step up and invest in creating a cadre of statewide coaches who will be fully dedicated to working with teachers to implement what they have learned in the AIM and SUNY courses. Consistent funding and community support are essential to the successful implementation of a statewide coaching program.

## Align Teacher-Preparation Programs with the Science of Reading

As reported in our last report, 10 of the 15 Maryland teacher-preparation programs NCTQ reviewed in 2023 received failing grades on implementation of SOR. State officials and higher education leaders must take greater responsibility for strengthening these programs to ensure that teacher candidates are fully equipped to teach reading effectively — at every grade level.

## Adopt an Adolescent Literacy Policy

NAEP reading scores revealed that the downward trend in 8th-grade reading continues but recent MCAP scores highlight emerging signs of progress. By July 1, 2026, MSDE should adopt an adolescent literacy policy that has broad support.

## Teacher Training Enrollment

### SUNY New Paltz’s Science of Reading Fundamentals Micro-credential

- Enrollment: 11,211 educators from all 24 of Maryland’s public school districts, with county enrollments ranging from 35% to 1% of teachers.
- Completion: 59% or 6,614 of enrolled educators have completed the course. This is a 2% increase since the spring of 2025.

### AIM Pathways to Literacy Leadership (PLL)

- Enrollment: 432 educators from all of Maryland’s 24 public school districts have enrolled in and started the course.
- Completion: 48% of enrolled educators have completed the course, and 46% are still actively taking it.

### AIM Pathways to Proficient Reading: Secondary (PPRS)

- Enrollment: 354 educators from 23 Maryland public school districts have enrolled, with enrollment ranges from 8% of teachers in one county to no teachers in just one county.
- Completion: 39% of educators enrolled in the course have completed it, 7% have not started it, and 54% are actively taking it.

### AIM Specialized Reading Knowledge: English Learners (EL)

- Enrollment: 250 educators have enrolled in the EL course across 20 public school districts, with enrollments ranging from 2% of teachers in one county to no educators in four counties.
- Completion: 60% of enrolled educators have completed it, 37% are actively taking it, and 3% have yet to start it.

# ADVANCE THRIVING READING ECOSYSTEMS

## Establish READ Strong Networks

By the end of 2028, every county should establish a READ Strong Network. Philanthropic leaders and key decision makers need to come together to ensure resources are available to help these networks form and adopt research-based approaches employed outside of the classroom that have a positive impact on reading proficiency.

## Empower Local Reading Activists

Maryland READS provides data toolkits tailored to each county and can train READ Strong Network leaders to present county-level data to leaders and community members. Philanthropists, foundations, and government entities should make more robust and targeted investments in communities to support the launch of READ Strong Networks whose work is tailored to individual local needs.

## Inspire Business Leaders to Come to the Table

Business leaders should establish a statewide task force of researchers, educators, parents, students, and state leaders to support the establishment of READ Strong Networks across the state. Business communities have a vested interest in improving reading proficiency to create a more robust workforce in Maryland that is prepared to meet the demands of the 21st-century economy.



**“It’s a smart move for businesses to jump in and back quality public education. When we invest in education, we’re creating a workforce that can read, write, handle math, and think outside the box. Public education opens up a treasure trove of skilled workers for businesses, helping our economy thrive and building a strong, involved community.”**

— Pastor Clarence C. Crawford, President Emeritus,  
Maryland State Board of Education



## ADDRESS BARRIERS TO READING PROFICIENCY — THE DIGITAL DILEMMA

### Create a Statewide Task Force

Research reveals that technology is having a detrimental impact on reading proficiency. This is not limited to phones in schools but includes school-issued laptops and tablets and use of social media to communicate with students. State leaders should use existing research to identify how to limit the use of technology in teaching children to read.

### Limit Children’s Use of Electronic Devices and AI Tutors

Young children and students should spend less time, in and out of school, on electronic devices. In the last year we have learned a great deal about the harm to children from AI chatbots. Schools should not be using AI tutors, especially in elementary school, until there is more research to prove they are safe. Community organizations should include strategies to limit digital devices in their work with students and families.

### Create Digital Education Programs for Families

Each year, we are learning more about the negative impact of technology on developing reading proficiency in students. Parents, as their children’s earliest teachers, need more education to understand what research is revealing about the role of screens and what they can do to limit their children’s use of screens.

**Young children and students should spend less time, in and out of school, on electronic devices.**



# CONCLUSION

## Turning Momentum into Measurable Change

Maryland stands at a defining moment in its literacy journey. The data in this report reveal both encouraging progress and persistent challenges. Maryland's reading crisis will not fix itself; it requires collective commitment and sustained action.

Behind every number in this report is a story — a teacher finding new ways to reach struggling readers, a parent rediscovering the joy of reading aloud, a community partner creating new spaces for reading. Data alone will not change outcomes; people will. Our task now is to build on our momentum through a shared focus on three essential priorities.

**Data alone will not change outcomes, people will. Maryland's reading crisis will not fix itself, it requires collective commitment and sustained action by all of us.**

- 1. Improving Instruction:** Maryland must continue to align teaching practice with the Science of Reading, ensuring that every teacher — from pre-K through high school — is equipped with the knowledge, confidence, and tools to teach reading effectively. Sustained investment in coaching, professional learning, and curriculum support will be critical to turning policy into practice and practice into proficiency.
- 2. Advancing Thriving Reading Ecosystems:** Literacy is not just a school issue; it is a community responsibility. Reading thrives when families, schools, libraries, and local organizations work together to create a culture of reading. Through the READ Strong Network, communities across Maryland are demonstrating how shared commitment can create the conditions where reading flourishes.
- 3. Addressing Barriers to Reading Proficiency:** Even the strongest instruction and community engagement cannot succeed if barriers persist. Chronic absenteeism and digital overexposure continue to hinder progress. Maryland must continue to strengthen its community schools, promote consistent attendance, and balance digital learning with the deep, focused reading that builds comprehension and empathy.

Together, these focus areas form the roadmap to lasting improvement. Improving instruction builds stronger classrooms. Advancing thriving reading ecosystems connect those classrooms to the community. Addressing barriers ensures that every child can benefit fully from both.

Maryland has the data, the tools, and the will to lead the nation. The challenge before us is not whether progress can happen — it already is — but whether we will sustain it. By leading with transparency, collaboration, and heart, Maryland can turn today’s momentum into tomorrow’s measurable success and ensure that every child reads with confidence, curiosity, and purpose.

**Maryland has the data, the tools, and the desire to lead the nation. The challenge before us is not whether progress can happen — it already is — but whether we have the will to make the difficult choices necessary to sustain it.**



# The Science of Reading in Practical Terms

The Science of Reading represents what we have learned from decades of research on how the brain works to help us more effectively teach children to become readers. By actively reviewing educational materials and maintaining open communication with teachers, parents and guardians can ensure their children receive reading instruction consistent with the Science of Reading principles.

Children Best Learn to Read When They Are Taught	What You Can Do to Support a Child	What to Look for in Classrooms	Questions to Ask Your Child's Teacher or School About How Reading Is Taught
<p><b>PHONEMIC AWARENESS</b></p> <p>It's all about SOUNDS. This is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. It's like being able to break down the word "cat" into its sounds: /k/, /a/, /t/.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practice breaking words into individual sounds.</li> <li>Play sound games like rhyming games, clapping syllables, or identifying the first, middle, and last sounds in words.</li> <li>Read aloud and emphasize sounds.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers provide lessons on identifying individual sounds in words and practice those sounds.</li> <li>Classrooms engage students in sound recognition like rhyming games or sound matching tasks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How are students taught to identify and work with individual sounds in words (phonemic awareness)?</li> <li>Are lessons moving step-by-step, building on what students already know with time to practice?</li> </ul>
<p><b>PHONICS</b></p> <p>This involves teaching the relationship between sounds and their spellings. For example, learning that the letter "b" makes the /b/ sound.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Talk about how letters make words.</li> <li>Play letter-sound matching games.</li> <li>Practice decoding words where children sound out words while reading, rather than guessing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New sounds and letters introduced are in a logical order, building on what students have already learned.</li> <li>Students practice these skills through reading and writing activities.</li> <li>Decodable books are available for students to practice skills.</li> <li>Classrooms use books, not screens or tablets, for reading.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When kids don't know a word, are they taught to sound it out?</li> <li>Do children practice connecting sounds to letters every day?</li> <li>Does the teacher tell students to guess words from pictures or context?</li> <li>Does the school use something called the "Three-Cueing System"? If yes, how do they make sure kids still learn phonics?</li> </ul>

Children Best Learn to Read When They Are Taught	What You Can Do to Support a Child	What to Look for in Classrooms	Questions to Ask Your Child's Teacher or School About How Reading Is Taught
<p><b>FLUENCY</b></p> <p>This is the ability to read text accurately, quickly, and with proper expression. Fluent readers can focus on understanding the text rather than decoding words.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Use familiar books for practice and to build fluency.</li> <li>■ Create a welcoming space at home for reading or take your child to the library.</li> <li>■ Work with your child to set aside time for reading,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Teachers should allow students to read aloud with guidance and feedback.</li> <li>■ Repeated reading practices in which students read the same passage multiple times to build confidence and proficiency.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How does the teacher check if students are really understanding what they read?</li> <li>■ Do kids get to read out loud with guidance and practice reading the same text more than once?</li> </ul>
<p><b>VOCABULARY</b></p> <p>This is about knowing the meaning of words and how to use them correctly. A strong vocabulary helps with comprehension.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Let your kids encounter new words and ideas.</li> <li>■ Introduce new word in daily conversations.</li> <li>■ Play word games like word-of-the-day challenges, crossword puzzles, or picture-word matching games.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Explicit vocabulary teaching with new words and clear definitions.</li> <li>■ Teaching students how to understand unfamiliar words using context clues, prefixes, suffixes, and root words.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How do students learn new vocabulary words?</li> <li>■ Are students learning ways for figuring out new words (like prefixes, suffixes, and root words)?</li> </ul>
<p><b>COMPREHENSION</b></p> <p>This is the ultimate goal of reading – understanding what is being read. It involves making connections, asking questions, and summarizing information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ask open-ended questions about the story to encourage thinking.</li> <li>■ Make connections to real life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Teachers should model and encourage practices like predicting, questioning, summarizing, and clarifying to enhance understanding.</li> <li>■ Use of graphic organizers to help students organize information and visualize relationships within the text.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Are students shown how to think while reading, like asking questions or making connections?</li> <li>■ Do teachers use charts or graphic organizers to help kids understand stories and information?</li> </ul>
<p><b>WRITING</b></p> <p>Reading and writing go hand in hand. Writing reinforces reading skills and helps them express their thoughts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ If they are ready, encourage your child to write stories, letters, or keep a journal.</li> <li>■ Co-write grocery lists, letters, or stories, allowing your child to contribute ideas and words.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Writing should become automatic at writing letters, then words, then sentences, then paragraphs.</li> <li>■ Students should be guided through steps in the process, including planning, drafting, revising, and editing.</li> <li>■ Writing activities should be connected to reading assignments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ For writing lessons, do students write about what they are reading?</li> <li>■ Do kids learn all the steps of writing (planning, drafting, revising, and editing)?</li> <li>■ Do writing assignments help students think deeper about what they read?</li> </ul>

# TOP 10

# Elements of a Thriving Reading Ecosystem

A thriving reading ecosystem can look different in each community, but certain common, research-based elements show that reading is valued, supported, and promoted by a wide range of stakeholders and resources. Common characteristics of ecosystems that support reading include:

## 1 Recognition of Reading's Importance

- **Cultural value:** Reading is embedded in the culture of the community as a fundamental activity. Faith-based organizations, businesses, and local leaders regularly promote the value of reading.
- **Communitywide reading campaigns:** Awareness campaigns and outreach programs highlight the importance of reading for success in school and life, encouraging people to make reading a part of their daily routines.

## 2 Early and Ongoing Engagement with Reading

- **Starting from birth:** Families, pediatricians, and early childhood centers emphasize reading aloud from the earliest stages, encouraging language development.
- **Continuous exposure:** Children are consistently exposed to books and reading opportunities, both at home and in the community, throughout their childhood.

## 3 Communitywide Support

- **Collaboration:** Schools, businesses, libraries, faith-based organizations, community centers, and local governments work together to create a comprehensive system of support for reading development.
- **Inclusive participation:** Everyone in the community plays a role — parents, teachers, local businesses, and community leaders all contribute to fostering a reading culture.

## 4 Access to Books and Reading Materials

- **Equitable access:** Everyone has access to age-appropriate books and reading materials, whether through public libraries, free book exchanges, or community initiatives like Little Free Libraries.
- **Variety and diversity:** The ecosystem provides diverse reading materials, representing a range of genres, topics, languages, and cultures to ensure that all children find books that resonate with their interests and experiences.

## 5 Responsible Integration of Technology and Traditional Reading Instruction

- **Balanced use of technology:** Digital tools and resources need to be integrated more thoughtfully in order for students to develop deep reading skills and better comprehension of what they are reading. Technology can enhance skill development, build background knowledge, and break down language barriers, yet its use should be limited to avoid fostering screen time addiction.
- **Physical spaces for reading:** Libraries, bookstores, and community centers provide spaces where children and families can engage with books in a quiet, focused environment.

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## 6 Support for Struggling Readers

- **Targeted interventions:** Strong systems are in place for identifying and supporting struggling readers early. This may involve tutoring, reading specialists, and after-school programs that provide tailored, research-based support for children who need extra help.
- **Personalized approaches:** Not all children learn in the same way, so the ecosystem offers a variety of research-based strategies to meet diverse needs, from one-on-one tutoring to group reading sessions.

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## 7 Communitywide and Family Involvement

- **Parental engagement:** Parents are encouraged and supported to become active participants in their children's literacy development, whether by reading aloud, visiting libraries, or participating in family reading events.
- **Events and activities:** Regular community events, such as book fairs, story times, and reading challenges, engage families and children in the joy of reading outside formal education settings.

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## 8 Sustained Investment in Reading

- **Funding and resources:** A thriving reading ecosystem is supported by consistent investment in educational programs, libraries, and reading initiatives.
- **Professional development:** Teachers, librarians, and community leaders receive ongoing professional development to stay informed about best practices for fostering literacy.

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## 9 Opportunities for Social and Emotional Development

- **Reading as an emotional experience:** The ecosystem supports not only cognitive development but also the social and emotional aspects of reading. Storytelling, book discussions, and reading activities help children build empathy and communication skills.
- **Inclusive and welcoming environment:** There are efforts to make reading accessible and enjoyable for all children, regardless of their background, language, or socioeconomic status.

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## 10 Ongoing Assessment and Growth

- **Reading proficiency used to measure school success:** Schools and communities publicly state that improving and maintaining reading proficiency rates is a key measure of success for schools.
- **Data-driven approaches:** Data is available in a format that is easy for communities, parents, and caregivers to understand and use. Schools regularly assess children's reading progress to ensure programs are effective. Community programs track reading proficiency rates and adjust strategies as needed to ensure all children are supported. Parents understand how to monitor their children's reading proficiency rates.
- **Continuous improvement:** The ecosystem continually evolves to respond to changing needs, such as by integrating new reading tools or adjusting programs to reflect community demographics.

# How to Support Maryland READS' Call to Action

## IMPROVE INSTRUCTION

### Understand Your Data

MSDE provides [Public School Report Cards](#) each year that detail reading proficiency rates at the state, district, and school level. Maryland READS further analyzes that data to help local leaders and community members understand if they are improving reading instruction at critical grade levels over time. For information on each elementary school, [view the Bright Spots interactive map](#). Learn more on [page 34](#) of this report.

#### WHAT DISTRICTS CAN DO

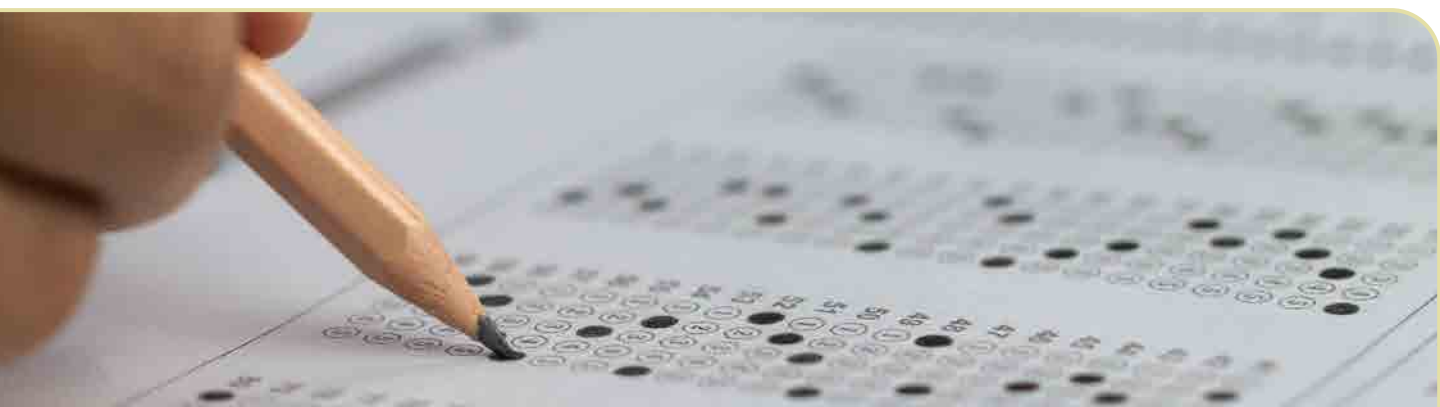
- Create a shared understanding among school boards and district leaders of reading proficiency rates and what direction they are headed.
- Support teachers in understanding how to use student data to inform instructional practices.

#### WHAT SCHOOL LEADERS AND TEACHERS CAN DO

- Learn how to use data to improve instruction.
- Help parents and caregivers understand their students' reading proficiency scores and how they can support students at home.

#### WHAT PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS CAN DO

- Ask for information about your child's reading proficiency and additional help to understanding what it means and what you can do.



## Train Teachers

In May 2024, MSDE received a [\\$6.8 million grant from the IBIS Group](#) to fund AIM Pathways professional learning opportunities and SUNY New Paltz SOR micro-credentials. These courses have been available to educators for just over one year. Yet, there are still counties where educators have not taken advantage of these opportunities. We challenge teachers and administrators IN EVERY COUNTY to complete the AIM Pathways courses along with the SUNY New Paltz micro-credential.

### WHAT MSDE AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS CAN DO

- Provide public information on participation rates by district in these courses.
- Create a digital badge so course completers can show they have completed a course.

### WHAT EVERYONE CAN DO

- Learn more about the AIM Pathways professional learning opportunities and the SUNY New Paltz SOR micro-credential. Consider enrolling if you are eligible.

### WHAT TEACHERS AND LEADERS CAN DO

- Complete the training and encourage your peers to do the same.
- Be proactive in informing parents and community organizations about your participation in these classes.

### WHAT SCHOOL LEADERS CAN DO

- Become a model and enroll in AIM Pathway courses.
- Provide incentives for teachers and leaders to take the training.
- Recognize staff who have taken the training.

### WHAT PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS CAN DO

- Ask teachers and leaders if they have taken this training. You can do this at back-to-school events and parent/teacher conferences.
- Ask your school district how many teachers and leaders have participated and identify schools where no one has enrolled yet.

# Fund MSDE's Statewide Coaching Model

Coaching helps ensure that teacher training receive translates into impact in the classroom and, ultimately, improved proficiency rates. In 2025, the Maryland Legislature created a statewide coaching program but did not fund it. It's time for Maryland to step up and invest in creating a cadre of statewide coaches who will be fully dedicated to working with teachers to implement what they have learned in the AIM and SUNY courses. Consistent funding and community support are essential to the statewide implementation of coaching.

## WHAT EVERYONE CAN DO

- Learn why and how coaching makes a difference in improving reading proficiency rates.
- Read Maryland READS brief, Maryland's Opportunity to Lead through Literacy Coaching.
- Learn more about [MSDE's Coaching Model](#).

## WHAT LEGISLATORS CAN DO

- Establish a dedicated funding stream in the 2026 Legislative Session to support the establishment and sustainability of a statewide coaching program.

## WHAT EDUCATORS CAN DO

- Participate in the coaching opportunities provided by MSDE.
- Tell your stories and highlight the positive experiences your team has already had.

## WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

- Tell your legislators you support investments in a statewide coaching program.
- Ask teachers at your school if they have received literacy coaching.

# Align Teacher-Preparation Programs with the Science of Reading

As reported in our [last report](#), 10 of the 15 Maryland teacher-preparation programs NCTQ reviewed in 2023 received failing grades on implementation of SOR. State officials and higher education leaders must take greater responsibility for strengthening these programs to ensure that teacher candidates are fully equipped to teach reading effectively — at every grade level.

## WHAT HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERS CAN DO

- Hold department chairs that manage teacher-preparation programs accountable for embedding SOR approaches into their curriculum.
- Commit resources to support a two-year change process.

## WHAT STATE LEADERS CAN DO

- Use all available levers to hold Maryland institutions of higher education accountable for transforming their teacher-preparation programs. This can include limits on grants and contracts or requiring higher education institutions to pay for the reading instruction training their graduates still need.



# Adopt an Adolescent Literacy Policy

Maryland's NAEP reading scores revealed that the downward trend in 8th-grade reading continues but recent MCAP scores reveal emerging signs of progress. By July 1, 2026, MSDE should adopt an adolescent literacy policy that has broad support.

## WHAT MSDE CAN DO

- Produce a draft adolescent literacy policy with ample time for stakeholder feedback.

## WHAT DISTRICT LEADERS CAN DO

- Host community meetings to gather feedback on the draft policy so the community's voice is included in the process.

## WHAT COMMUNITIES CAN DO

- Connect with local organizations engaged in reading and work together to provide feedback on the draft policy.



# Improve Reading Scores in Community Schools

Community schools serve students in historically underserved communities who most need support. Significant state investment in community schools provides a real opportunity to help students become proficient in reading. We applaud MSDE for including reading proficiency rates in community schools as a metric to measure success in its presentation to the State Board in September 2025.

## WHAT STATE LEADERS CAN DO

- Tie future funding for community schools to requirements for teachers and leaders to take the AIM/SUNY training.
- Prioritize coaching support for teachers in community schools.
- Future funding for community schools should prioritize investments in reading such as coaching and research-based curriculum.

## WHAT COMMUNITY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND LEADERS CAN DO

- Complete the AIM/SUNY training.
- Prioritize coaching for teachers who have taken the trainings and participate in MSDE sponsored coaching training sessions.
- Encourage your peers to do the same.

## WHAT PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS CAN DO

- Ask if the teachers and leaders at your school have taken the no-cost SOR training.



### Establish READ Strong Networks

By the end of 2028, every county should establish a READ Strong Network. Philanthropic leaders and key decision makers need to come together to ensure resources are available to help these networks adopt research-based approaches outside of the classroom that have a positive impact on reading proficiency.

#### WHAT COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS CAN DO

- Contact Maryland READS to arrange a briefing on the tools and resources available to help you get started with a READ Strong Network.
- Consider how to layer in reading activities when working with families and children.
- Talk with teachers and leaders about their needs and challenges to learn how to offer support.

### Empower Local Reading Activists

Maryland READS provides data toolkits tailored to each county and can train READ Strong Network leaders to present county-level data to leaders and community members. Philanthropists, foundations, and government entities should make more robust and targeted investments in communities to support the launch of READ Strong Networks whose work is tailored to individual local needs.

#### WHAT FUNDERS CAN DO

- Sponsor a READ Strong Network in your community with a planning grant and then help them secure funding for initiatives that provide direct support to families and students..

## WHAT COUNTY LEADERS CAN DO

- Share this report with the philanthropy community in your county.
- Conduct a landscape scan of reading resources and support and share it on a publicly available web page.
- Invest in local libraries and librarians.
- Talk about local reading proficiency rates (contact Maryland READS if you need help gathering that data) and how the state is building a foundation for improvement.
- Talk about the important role communities play in creating thriving reading ecosystems and ask funders to invest in local initiatives.

## Inspire Business Leaders to Come to the Table

Business leaders should establish a statewide task force to support READ Strong Networks across the state. Business communities have a vested interest in improving reading proficiency to create a more robust workforce in Maryland that is prepared to meet the demands of the 21st-century economy.

## WHAT BUSINESS LEADERS CAN DO

- Reach out to peers to establish a statewide task force.
- Provide time for employees to serve as reading tutors.
- Provide financial support for local organizations engaged in reading-related activities.
- Lend your leadership skills or technical expertise to community organizations to help them establish a READ Strong Network.
- Offer to serve as a board member for Maryland READS.



### Create a Statewide Task Force

Research reveals that technology is having a detrimental impact on reading proficiency. This is not limited to phones in schools but includes school-issued laptops and tablets as well as the use of social media to communicate with students. State leaders should use existing research to identify how to limit the use of technology in teaching children to read.

### Limit Children’s Use of Electronic Devices and AI Tutors

Young children and students should spend less time, in and out of school, on electronic devices. In the last year we have learned a great deal about the harm to children from AI chatbots. Schools should not be using AI tutors, especially in elementary school, until there is more research to prove they are safe. Community organizations should include strategies to limit digital devices in their work with students and families.



# Create Digital Education Programs for Families

Each year, we are learning more about the negative impact of technology on developing reading proficiency in students. Parents, as their children's earliest teachers, need more education to understand what research is revealing about the role of screens and what they can do to limit their children's use of screens.

## WHAT STATE AND LOCAL LEADERS CAN DO

- Enact policies to limit the use of technology devices and AI chatbots in schools with particular focus on elementary schools.
- Invest in tools and resources to educate parents about why they should limit screen time.
- Host public conversations in town halls, community meetings, congregations, and school events to raise awareness of the role caregivers can play in ensuring children's screen time is appropriate.

## WHAT SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS CAN DO

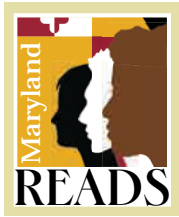
- Offer programming to teach parents about the negative impact of screen time.
- Equip parents and students with strategies to replace screens with books and offer book distribution programs.
- Collaborate with local libraries to encourage families and students to use them more.

## WHAT BUSINESSES CAN DO

- Set up a library in your store or restaurant to encourage children and families to put screens away and read together.



# About Maryland READS



Maryland READS is a non-profit founded to end the literacy crisis in Maryland. We focus on three proven paths to closing the literacy gap: improving reading instruction through the Science of Reading; creating thriving community-based reading ecosystems; and addressing barriers that prevent students from becoming proficient readers. Through collaboration and strategic partnerships, we are building a powerful statewide network to engage, share best practices, advocate, and shape action plans to ensure all children have the literacy skills they need. Learn more at [marylandreads.org](http://marylandreads.org)



## VISION

Maryland READS envisions a future where our diverse population of students become confident and proficient readers.



## MISSION

To foster a transformative culture that dramatically improves reading proficiency across Maryland by empowering stakeholders and amplifying their collective voices to drive meaningful change in policy and practice within their communities and our state.

## OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Jennifer Bell-Ellwanger, MEd**

President and CEO Data Quality Campaign,



**Winsome Waite, PhD**

Project Manager, Strategic Initiatives Office  
Prince George's County Public Schools



**Ellen O'Neill, MA**

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Founder, Boundless Expectations



**WE'RE RECRUITING!**

To apply, scan the QR code or  
visit [marylandreads.org/join-us](http://marylandreads.org/join-us).

# Endnotes

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# Notes

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## JOIN US!

Maryland READS is actively recruiting members for our board of directors and expert advisory committee, as well as partner organizations to join our coalition. Please contact us if you have questions or would like to learn about opportunities to be engaged.

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Maryland READS is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that believes research and data drive discussions that lead to decisions.

Visit us online at [marylandreads.org](http://marylandreads.org)