



PRESS RELEASE

▶ Maryland READS Submits Comprehensive Comments on MSDE's Draft Adolescent Literacy Policy

February 25th, 2027

Calls for Stronger K-12 Continuum, Expanded Literacy Coaching, and Clear Accountability to Support Maryland's Students and Tomorrow's Workforce

Maryland READS announced the submission of its formal comments on the Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) draft adolescent literacy policy.

Maryland READS commends State Superintendent Dr. Carey Wright for advancing a comprehensive literacy strategy designed to accelerate reading success from early elementary through the secondary grades. The organization emphasized that the draft policy represents meaningful progress, but that its success will depend on clear implementation pathways, sustained educator support, enforceable accountability, and a stronger focus on students in grades 4-12. Improving literacy at every stage is critical not only for student success in school but also for Maryland's economic competitiveness and workforce readiness.

Literacy and Maryland's Workforce Future

According to the most recent NAEP rankings, 67% of 8th grade students in Maryland CANNOT read proficiency and high school proficiency rates across the country show a continued decline. Those facts are not just an education concern — it is an economic one.

Maryland's labor force totals nearly 2.8 million workers, with health care, technology, professional services, and government among the state's largest employment sectors. At the same time, the Maryland Higher Education Commission and state labor officials are identifying priority occupations that require post-secondary education and strong reading and writing skills.

Governor Wes Moore has underscored the connection between a strong education system and economic growth, emphasizing investments in K-12 education and workforce development in his State of the State address. At the same time, Maryland has been actively supporting workforce training for AI, emerging technologies, and industry-

led credential programs while investing millions to align job seekers with in-demand employment opportunities.

“Reading and writing are not just academic skills,” said Trish Brennan-Gac, Executive Director of Maryland READS. “They are foundational skills for Maryland’s future workforce. If students cannot read complex texts, technical manuals, or write clearly, they will be less prepared to succeed in high-growth fields like cybersecurity, life sciences, advanced manufacturing, and healthcare — sectors Maryland is actively cultivating.”

Why This Policy Matters Now

Across Maryland and nationally, public dialogue has intensified around the observation that many young people enter college unprepared to read full books, engage in deep analysis, or write with discipline and coherence. These skills are not only academic thresholds but essentials for success in higher education, the modern workplace, and to thrive in their lives.

Maryland READS believes the draft adolescent literacy policy, if strengthened and fully implemented, can help address these systemic concerns by:

- Promoting instructional coherence across grade levels
- Training educators in reading instruction accompanied by sustained coaching
- Aligning literacy outcomes with college and career expectations
- Embedding accountability mechanisms that ensure consistent implementation

Literacy Coaching: A Critical Lever Across All Grades

Maryland READS’ statewide discussions on the draft policy consistently highlighted literacy coaching as a core need. While MSDE’s is currently prioritizing coaching for elementary reading as its works to implement the new PreK-3 Literacy Policy, Maryland READS Expert Advisory Delegation members emphasized that teachers at all grade levels — from early elementary through high school — require job-embedded coaching to effectively integrate literacy instruction in their classrooms.

“Literacy challenges do not stop in third grade,” Brennan-Gac said. “If ‘all teachers are literacy teachers,’ then all teachers need support through dedicated coaching, ongoing professional learning, and high-quality instructional feedback.”

A Call to Strengthen the Future

Maryland READS emphasized that momentum is building for stronger literacy outcomes statewide.

“We have an opportunity to set a new standard for literacy in Maryland — one that aligns

students' reading and writing skills with the demands of college, career, and community life," Brennan-Gac said. "We encourage MSDE and the State Board to leverage this moment and adopt a final policy that is ambitious, actionable, and rooted in proven practice."

Maryland READS reiterated its commitment to serving as a constructive partner in refining and implementing a policy that sets Maryland students up for success in school and beyond.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Maryland READS' review and stakeholder feedback yielded several priority recommendations for strengthening the draft policy:

1. **Ensure a True K–12 Literacy Continuum**
The policy should more explicitly address literacy instruction and supports for students in grades 4–12, including targeted intervention and writing development.
2. **Expand Coaching Across All Grades**
Coaching must be sustained, content-specific, and available to educators across the K-12 spectrum to improve instructional practice and student outcomes.
3. **Define Clear Intervention Pathways**
Screening alone is insufficient. The policy should specify intervention timelines, roles, and expectations for Tier 1–3 supports.
4. **Elevate Writing and Critical Thinking**
Literacy must include writing development, analytical reasoning, and communication skills that align to workplace and postsecondary demands.
5. **Strengthen Implementation and Accountability**
The policy should define clear roles, timelines, and expectations, and hold districts to transparent benchmarks with monitoring and support aligned to implementation fidelity.
6. **Commit to Equity**
The policy should recognize students' linguistic and cultural assets and ensure that supports are equitably distributed for students with diverse learning needs.

ABOUT MARYLAND READS

Maryland READS is a nonprofit organization dedicated to ending the literacy crisis in Maryland through research, advocacy, and network building. The organization works statewide to improve reading outcomes, support educators, empower families, and advance policy solutions that ensure every child can read proficiently and thrive academically and economically. Learn more about our growing reading network at marylandreads.org