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**TO:** Members of the State Board of Education

**FROM:** Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools 

**DATE:** October 22, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Comprehensive PreK to 3 Literacy Policy Update and Request for Adoption

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### **Purpose**

The State Board of Education (SBOE) will receive an update on the fourth draft of the Comprehensive PreK to 3 Literacy Policy and a request for adoption.

### **Background**

On August 27, and September 24, 2024, the SBOE received an update and provided feedback on the draft State Comprehensive Literacy Policy. The SBOE was originally scheduled to receive a presentation and request to adopt the revised Literacy Policy on September 24, 2024, however, due to recent changes in SBOE membership, the presentation was rescheduled for October to allow for a more thorough review and edits to the policy. Since the September SBOE meeting, staff from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), Office of Literacy Programs and Initiatives, continued to receive, compile, and analyze feedback from the SBOE, community members, and advocacy groups.

### **Executive Summary**

Since July 2024, the MSDE, Office of Literacy Programs and Initiatives, has drafted and presented three draft Comprehensive Literacy Policies to the SBOE. To date, the team has received over 1800 comments or stakeholder feedback with explicit suggestions for revisions. These suggestions along with recent feedback from the SBOE were considered as the team drafted the fourth version of the Literacy Policy for SBOE approval. The revisions made to this fourth iteration of the policy include:

- Clarification on the inclusion of all students;
- Clarification on guidance, technical assistance, and training provided by MSDE;
- Focus on Tier I/Core Instruction;
- Focus on Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS);
- Provision of multiple pathways for students to transition from grade to grade;
- Clarification of responsibilities for local education agencies (LEAs), MSDE, and the SBOE;
- More information on parental notification and additional supports; and
- Provision of an updated timeline.

## Key Features of the Policy

The final version of the Literacy Policy is designed to improve literacy outcomes for all Maryland students, particularly those who are disadvantaged or at risk, provide guidance and support to LEAs in implementing effective literacy programs, and aligns with the SBOE's goals for improving educational outcomes for all students.

- **Evidence-based approach:** The policy aligns with the science of reading and incorporates evidence-based practices to ensure effective literacy instruction.
- **Equity:** The policy promotes instructional equity by providing all students with access to high-quality literacy instruction, regardless of their background or needs.
- **Early intervention:** The policy emphasizes early identification and intervention for students who may be at risk for reading difficulties.
- **Collaboration:** The policy fosters collaboration between schools, families, and communities to support students' literacy development.

## Action

Request for adoption of the Comprehensive PreK-3 Literacy Policy.

## Attachments

Draft 10.4.2024-Literacy-Policy CLEAN.docx

October Literacy Policy Information Presentation.pptx



MARYLAND STATE  
BOARD OF EDUCATION

# DRAFT

# Comprehensive PreK-3 Literacy Policy

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Version 4, October 2024

Maryland State Board of Education

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## Stakeholder Engagement and Ongoing Revisions

Utilizing feedback from the Maryland State Board of Education (SBOE), the Literacy Advisory Panel, and explicit feedback from the public comment periods, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has revised the Draft Literacy Policy to include the revisions highlighted below:

Feedback	Revisions Made to Draft Literacy Policy
Focus on Tier 1/Core Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on quality and purpose of core instruction</li> <li>• Defined Tier 1 instruction more clearly</li> </ul>
Focus on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarifies explicit support for early intervention</li> <li>• Provides specific criteria for reading intervention programs for students in grades K-3</li> </ul>
Clarification on guidance, technical assistance, and training provided by MSDE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarifies that MSDE will assist local education agencies (LEAs) in implementing the policy by providing guidance, technical assistance, and training as it pertains to MTSS, promotion policies, and Student Reading Improvement Plans (SRIPs).</li> </ul>
Inclusion of All Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft policy supports all students in PreK-3</li> </ul>
Clarification on LEAs Roles and Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mandates LEA policies for promotion and retention with MSDE guidance</li> </ul>
Feature Parent/Guardian Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides multiple touchpoints to include families in the educational process</li> <li>• Provided additional language on designated consent</li> </ul>
Connection to Existing Regulations and Statutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ready to Read Act, COMAR 13A.08, §7-202 of Maryland's Education Code</li> </ul>
Timeline for Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A timeline is included regarding policy implementation</li> </ul>

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## I. Purpose

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Since 2013, Maryland students have experienced a decline in reading performance, falling from third to forty-first in the nation on the Grade 4 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Assessment. This alarming gap underscores the urgent need to address reading proficiency, particularly for students with reading deficiencies, those living in poverty, multilingual learners, and students of color.

To address this challenge, a statewide Comprehensive PreK-3 Literacy Policy is essential. This policy will ensure that every student receives equitable, effective, and evidence-based reading instruction, preparing them for long-term academic success. By prioritizing the core components of foundational literacy skills (phonological awareness, phonics and spelling, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension development, etc.) for all students across Maryland, the state can provide each child with a pathway toward greater opportunity.

The General Assembly, the Maryland State Board of Education (SBOE), and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) share a common goal of ensuring that each student's progression from one grade to another be determined, in part, by their proficiency in reading. Local district school boards must implement clear policies that ensure students' reading needs are met through robust instruction and targeted interventions. Furthermore, the policy seeks to ensure parents and guardians are well informed about their child's reading progress, fostering collaboration between schools and families.

The Comprehensive PreK-3 Literacy Policy is designed to promote instructional equity, enhance literacy outcomes, and build a strong foundation for future success, regardless of students' cultural background, linguistic diversity, socioeconomic status, geographical location, or specific learning needs. MSDE recognizes that the policy is evolving to become more comprehensive to meet the diverse needs of all Maryland students. Future expansions will incorporate additional provisions for Pre-K and address the specific needs of students in grades 4-12. By addressing these critical needs, Maryland will see a ripple effect in its communities, including a more educated workforce, reduced poverty, and improved health outcomes.

This policy supports the ambitious goal outlined in State Board Resolution 24-01 for improving educational outcomes for all students, positioning Maryland to regain its status as a top-ten state in reading by 2027, as measured by the NAEP Reading Assessment for 4th and 8th grades.

## II. Definitions

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- A. **Dyslexia** is a type of specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is a word level reading disorder that affects a student's ability to read text accurately and/or fluently. Dyslexia occurs in individuals who demonstrate difficulties in one or more of the following cognitive processing areas: phonological processing, working memory, rapid naming, and processing speed. This difficulty is typically unexpected relative to other information processing/cognitive abilities. Difficulties with word level reading, text reading fluency, and spelling that are associated with dyslexia are evident despite high quality classroom instruction. Secondary consequences associated with dyslexia may include reading comprehension and reduced reading experience which can impede vocabulary development and background knowledge accrual.
- B. **Dyslexia Screening** assesses critical skills that are predictors of future reading success and helps to identify students who may exhibit characteristics of dyslexia.
- C. **Educator Preparation Program (EPP)** refers to any program within an institution of higher education (IHE) that prepares individuals for licensure as elementary teachers, school leaders, or other educational personnel.
- D. **Evidence-based** refers to programs or practices that have demonstrated a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on well-designed and well-implemented studies, quasi-experimental studies, or correlational studies with statistical control for selection bias.
- E. **Family Friendly Language** refers to language that is accessible and easy to understand for families, and that is responsive to their cultural and linguistic needs. It avoids jargon and acronyms. It can also include language that is inclusive of all family members, and that avoids making assumptions about their identities or relationships.
- F. **Good-Cause Exemptions** allow students to be exempt from retention to 3rd grade for valid reasons, but such students remain eligible for reading camps, instructional supports, services, and appropriate reading interventions based on their age and reading level.
- G. **Instructional Equity** is a practice that ensures an inclusive academic environment, addresses persistent disparities, examines biases, dismantles unfair systems, and provides every student with access to personalized, high-quality learning opportunities to reach their full potential.
- H. **Intensive Support** refers to Tier III support provided to students identified as needing more explicit and intensive instruction. Tier III instruction should not take place during core instructional time.
- I. **Literacy** is the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, achieve goals, and develop knowledge and potential. It involves reading, writing, speaking, and listening in ways that allow effective communication and comprehension of the world.
- J. **Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)** is a framework for enhancing academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes for all students. MTSS provides supports for students with reading challenges, addressing identified needs with varying intensities and durations. The MTSS framework includes:
1. **Tier I:** On-grade level, standards-aligned general instruction for all students. It should occur within the core instructional block and be delivered through whole group or small group



- settings, with direct and explicit instruction. All students should be provided access to Tier I instruction (Multilingual Learners, Students with Disabilities, Students with a Student Reading Improvement Plan, etc.)
2. **Tier II:** In addition to core instruction, Tier II support involves small group interventions that align with evidence-based practices used in Tier I instruction.
  3. **Tier III:** For students not demonstrating growth in Tier II, Tier III provides diagnostic-based, explicit interventions tailored to their needs.
- K. **Reading Difficulties** refers to a student's challenges with decoding, language comprehension, or both; which affect their ability to achieve grade-level reading proficiency.
- L. **Reading Intervention** (or supplemental instruction in reading) means evidence-based, sequential, systematic, explicit, and cumulative instruction or intervention to mastery of foundational literacy skills, including phonological or phonemic awareness and processing, phonics, and vocabulary to support development of decoding, spelling, fluency, writing, and reading comprehension skills to meet grade level curriculum. It encompasses evidence-based strategies to address reading challenges, including individual/small group instruction, multisensory approaches, tutoring, technology-assisted learning paired with face-to-face supports, and targeting specific reading skills.
- M. **Science of Reading** refers to a comprehensive body of research from fields such as cognitive psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, and education. This research informs effective reading instruction by focusing on how the brain processes written language.
- N. **Structured Literacy** is an evidence-based approach to teaching oral and written language aligned with the science of reading. It features explicit, systematic, sequential, cumulative, and diagnostic instruction in areas such as phonology, sound-symbol association, syllable instruction, morphology, syntax, and semantics.
- O. **Student Reading Improvement Plan (SRIP)** refers to a personalized plan to help students improve their reading skills. It includes assessments, goals, instruction, and monitoring.
- P. **System of Assessments** refers to a comprehensive assessment system that includes screening, diagnostic (informal), progress monitoring, formative, and summative assessments used by LEAs. These assessments should evaluate key indicators of future reading success, including critical prerequisite skills.
- Q. **Three-Cueing System** refers to teaching methods based on meaning, structure, syntax, and visual cues (MSV). This system encourages students to guess words rather than focus on decoding them using letter sounds, which can hinder their ability to recognize words efficiently in the future.
- R. **Universal Screener** is an assessment administered three times per year (beginning, middle, and end) to identify or predict students at risk for poor reading outcomes. It is typically brief and assesses skills such as phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary, as developmentally appropriate.

## III. Policy Standards

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### A. SYSTEM OF SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS

1. Beginning in School Year (SY) 2024-2025, MSDE shall provide professional learning for all general education, special education, teachers of multilingual learners (English learners), speech-language pathologists, administrators, and other staff who support literacy instruction (e.g., paraprofessionals) for students in Pre-Kindergarten through 3rd grade to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to teach all students to read.
2. Per COMAR 13A.12.02, all applicants seeking initial licensure in early childhood education (PreK through 3rd grade), elementary education (grades 1-6), special education (birth through adult), and English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) must demonstrate proficiency aligned with the science of reading. The LEA must provide professional learning for administrators, classroom teachers, including special education, speech-language pathologists, and teachers of multilingual learners as well as other key staff (content and program supervisors, coordinators, coaches, interventionists) on the system of assessments selected by LEAs and approved by MSDE to ensure teachers have the knowledge and skills to administer the assessment and analyze the results to inform instruction.
3. Educator preparation programs are required to prepare candidates seeking licensure for early childhood, elementary education, and special education with training and instruction to:
  - a. Teach phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics including decoding and encoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension effectively;
  - b. Implement reading instruction using high-quality instructional materials which do not include the three-cueing systems model ("guessing strategies") or leveled readers ("matching students to leveled text");
  - c. Provide effective instruction and interventions for students with reading difficulties, including students with characteristics of dyslexia;
  - d. Understand and use student data to make instructional decisions including decisions about improving the effectiveness of classroom reading instruction in Tier I and intervention design in Tier II and III;
  - e. Understand the negative impacts of the three-cueing systems model, how to identify it in curriculum or instructional material, and why it is a flawed model of teaching children to read; and
  - f. Pass a State Board-approved assessment for initial licensure which assesses the candidates' knowledge of the science of reading.

4. Coaching should be provided to support educators with the implementation of the science of reading:
  - a. School-based teacher training on evidence-based reading instruction and data-based decision-making to support the effectiveness of classroom reading instruction;
  - b. Co-planning;
  - c. Co-teaching; and
  - d. Non-evaluative coaching observations with timely feedback cycles for improving instruction.
5. Districts must report the number of general education teachers, special education teachers, teachers of multilingual learners, and administrators in grades PreK-3 who have received foundational training in the science of reading during that academic school year to MSDE by September 15 of each year.
6. MSDE will provide guidance, technical assistance, and training on developing and implementing frameworks for MTSS and interventions embedded within the SRIP as outlined in section V.B.

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**B. READING INSTRUCTION, ASSESSMENT AND INTERVENTION**

1. Per the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, the Ready to Read Act, Education Article 7-202 and COMAR 13A.03.08, it is the ultimate goal of the General Assembly that every student read at or above grade level by the end of grade 3.
2. All PreK-3 students must receive Tier I literacy instruction, also known as core instruction, aligned to the science of reading. Tier I instruction is defined as evidence-based, systematic, differentiated, and explicit instruction, and shall not include the three-cueing systems model of instruction. Tier I instruction must also:
  - a. Address one or more of the five components of reading with an intentional focus on the identified area(s) driven by the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards for Literacy/English Language Arts (ELA);
  - b. Require assessment of each student's reading competency throughout the year that includes the types of assessments as outlined in Section III.B.5, below;
  - c. Utilize a scope and sequence that is delivered explicitly with judicious review, allowing for active and engaged students;
  - d. Be delivered within literacy blocks that are sufficient to deliver effective and comprehensive instruction; and
  - e. Be comprised of an adequate number of daily instructional minutes for literacy Tier I instruction. LEAs should review guidance from the State Superintendent of Schools regarding the number of minutes for Tier I literacy instruction.
3. All Pre-K students in Maryland must receive instruction and curriculum aligned with the Science of Reading, as defined by the Maryland Early Learning Standards. This alignment emphasizes critical components such as phonological awareness, vocabulary development, and comprehension skills within the Language and Literacy Domain. The standards promote research-based, intentional teaching methods that foster foundational reading abilities. In addition, the Early Learning Standards incorporate individualized strategies and accommodations. The Language and Literacy Domain enables educators to tailor learning experiences, ensuring that all children, including those with diverse needs, can develop critical early literacy skills. Pre-K educators are tasked with creating literacy-rich, developmentally appropriate environments that equip children with the essential skills for future reading success, thereby laying a strong groundwork for their academic journey.
4. MSDE will provide a list of reviewed instructional materials in SY25-26, specifying whether they meet the criteria to be designated as High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) for LEAs to adopt. These materials must align with the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards and be based on scientifically grounded reading research designed to reduce the risk of reading failure. These materials shall:
  - a. Address the core components of foundational literacy;
  - b. Integrate culturally and linguistically sustaining practices; and
  - c. Not include the three-cueing systems model.

5. The system of assessments school districts use must include statewide universal screening (Education Article 4-136), diagnostic surveys, and progress monitoring of student growth toward grade-level reading. The system of assessments shall follow the required timeline outlined in COMAR 13A.03.08:
  - a. Beginning in SY 2025 -2026, MSDE will release a list of vetted and approved universal screeners to be administered three times per year (fall, winter, and spring: beginning of year, middle of year, and end of year). The screener will to be used to :
    - i. Identify students with early warning signs of reading difficulties which may include dyslexia;
    - ii. Measures, minimum, phonological and phonemic awareness, sound-symbol recognition, decoding, fluency, and rapid automatic naming. Measures may also include additional subtests such as encoding and reading comprehension, for example using an assessment such as MAZE.
  - b. Additional diagnostic tools should be identified and administered to support teachers with targeting instruction based on student needs.
  - c. Accurately and reliably identify students who demonstrate a reading difficulty and are at risk for poor learning outcomes.
  
6. In determining which assessments to approve for use by LEAs, MSDE shall also consider, at a minimum, the following factors:
  - a. The time required to conduct the assessment, with the intention of minimizing the impact on instructional time;
  - b. The professional development needed to administer, analyze the data, and develop instructional pathways; and
  - c. The timeliness in reporting assessment results to teachers, administrators, and parents/guardians.

7. Per the COMAR 13A.03.08 (Students at Risk for Reading Difficulties): Each PreK-3 student who exhibits difficulties in reading shall receive supplemental instruction aligned to their identified needs through MTSS which include:
  - a. A proactive, school-wide framework for supporting and increasing academic, behavioral, and social emotional outcomes for ALL students with areas of concern;
  - b. Program-specific monitoring tools that LEAs should use to collect and analyze intervention data to make instructional decisions;
  - c. Opportunities for students who are experiencing reading challenges to be identified early, receive targeted intervention to support their needs, and have their progress closely monitored over time;
  - d. Home partnerships with parents/guardians as an integral part of the decision-making team;
  - e. Supports that address a student's identified needs with varying intensity and duration across the three tiers; and
  - f. Provisions such that student participation in any tier of this framework does not delay or deny a student who may be suspected of having a disability from the appropriate evaluation under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
  - g. All students including Multilingual Learners, Students with Disabilities, Students with a Student Reading Improvement Plan, etc. must be provided access to all levels of tiered instruction.
8. Each PreK-3 student who exhibits difficulties in reading shall receive supplemental instruction through a reading program aligned to the science of reading. The reading intervention program shall:
  - a. Be provided in addition to core reading instruction that is provided to all students in the general education classroom;
  - b. Be implemented during regular school hours and shall not impede students' access to Tier I, grade-level aligned instruction;
  - c. Be provided to all PreK-3 students demonstrating a reading difficulty or who need supplemental instruction in reading. This includes students with the risk factors of dyslexia as determined by MSDE-approved assessment administered within the first thirty (30) days of school; and
  - d. Be provided in an explicit, systematic, sequential manner, with cumulative instruction in phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics including decoding and encoding, fluency, vocabulary, or comprehension, as applicable.

### C. PARENT/GUARDIAN NOTIFICATION AND STUDENT READING IMPROVEMENT PLAN (SRIP)

1. Beginning in SY 2026-2027, any student in grades PreK-3 who meets the following criteria shall receive a SRIP:
  - a. Students who have been identified as demonstrating difficulties in reading at any time, based upon the MSDE vetted and approved assessment system,
  - b. Students who have been identified for retention in grade 3, and
  - c. Any 4th-grade student promoted for a good cause or by parent/guardian consent.
2. The SRIP shall be developed no later than 30 days after identifying the reading difficulty.
3. The LEA must develop a process and procedures to notify the parent/guardian(s) of any PreK-3 student who exhibits difficulty in reading at any time during the school year in writing. This notification must be written in family-friendly language and include the following:
  - a. An explanation that their child has been identified as having difficulties in reading;
  - b. A description of the current services provided to the child;
  - c. A description of the proposed evidence-based reading interventions and supplemental instructional services and supports that will be provided to the child that are designed to remedy the identified area(s) of reading concern
  - d. An invitation to collaborate on the development of an individual reading improvement plan with the teacher, principal or designee, and/or other pertinent school personnel; and
  - e. Notification for the possibility of retention – if the child's reading issues are not remediated by the end of the grade level year and the child has received two years of intensive reading intervention, the following may be considered: retention, good cause exemption designation and/or other supports established by the LEA may be instituted. LEAs must consider providing flexible grouping that will allow a student to receive 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading interventions while receiving 4<sup>th</sup> grade instruction in other content areas.
4. The SRIP shall:
  - a. Be created by the teacher, principal or designee, and/or other pertinent school personnel in partnership with the parent/guardian(s);
  - b. Describe the evidence-based reading intervention program the student will receive to remedy the reading deficit;
  - c. Include the necessary frequency and intensity of interventions to remediate the identified areas of need and accelerate learning;
  - d. Meet the requirements for core instruction and reading interventions outlined in section B above;

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- e. Be reviewed and updated annually with the parent/guardian(s) if a student exhibits the need for a reading intervention;
  - f. Describe how each student will receive intensive reading intervention until the student no longer demonstrates difficulty in reading as determined by the LEA's approved system of assessment; and
  - g. Provide more intensified interventions to remedy specific area(s) of need and accelerate progress for any transfer or newly enrolled student identified with a reading difficulty.
5. MSDE will provide sample parent/guardian notification letters, a format for the SRIP, as well as technical assistance and training on these tools and resources.
  6. If a student has reading goals on their IEP, then the IEP will substitute for the development of a SRIP.

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#### D. DEMONSTRATED READINESS FOR PROMOTION

1. Grade 3 students must demonstrate adequate reading proficiency on the MSDE-adopted State English Language Arts Assessment to be designated for promotion to grade 4 (See MD Code, Education, § 7-202. Minimum levels of reading ability).
  - a. Upon recommendation from the State Superintendent of Schools, the SBOE will set the performance level for adequate reading proficiency.
  - b. Students will demonstrate the following to be designated for promotion to grade 4:
    - i. Scoring at or above the required performance level, indicating adequate reading proficiency on the grade 3 MSDE-adopted State English Language Arts Assessment to be designated, or
    - ii. Scoring at or above the required performance level on an MSDE-approved reassessment, and
    - iii. Triangulated data from valid and reliable multiple measures, such as curriculum-based measures (CBMs), diagnostic assessments, and benchmark assessments, or other assessment as identified by MSDE. Screener data and/or benchmarks should not be used in isolation for promotion purposes.
2. The LEA may designate a grade 3 student for promotion to grade 4 who does not demonstrate adequate reading proficiency if they qualify for a good cause exemption.
  - a. Good cause exemptions shall be limited to the following:
    - i. Students with disabilities whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) indicates participation in the Maryland Alternate Education Framework
    - ii. Students who have received less than two years of instruction aligned to World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) standards or who have demonstrated to be on track to meet the English language proficiency as measured by WIDA.
    - iii. Students with disabilities who participate in the statewide English Language Arts assessment and who have an IEP or a Section 504 plan that reflects that the student has received intensive reading intervention for at least two years, but still demonstrates a reading difficulty, or was previously retained for one year in Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, or 3rd grade.
    - iv. Students who were previously retained for one year in kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, or 3rd grade. No student shall be retained more than once as a result of this policy.
  - b. A student who is designated for promotion to grade 4 with a good cause exemption shall continue to receive intensive reading intervention that includes specific reading strategies prescribed in the SRIP until the student no longer demonstrates reading difficulty.

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- c. Requests to exempt students from the retention requirement using one of the good cause exemptions shall be made consistent with the following:
    - i. The school principal with input from the classroom teacher and other appropriate personnel shall determine whether a student qualifies for good cause exemptions. If the school principal determines that the student has met one of the good cause exemptions, the school principal shall provide the decisions made at the school level in writing to the district superintendent or designee.
3. A 3<sup>rd</sup> grader who does not demonstrate adequate reading proficiency and does not qualify for a good cause exemption may be designated for retention in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade with parent/guardian consent.
- a. At the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, it is required that LEAs and schools provide notification of the designation for promotion or retention and the informed consent process to the student's parent/guardian(s).
  - b. If a student is not designated for promotion to 4<sup>th</sup> grade, the notification must inform the parent/guardian of the process, which includes:
    - i. An invitation via phone call, letter, or email, etc., to meet to discuss the recommendation retention in 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade;
    - ii. A letter designating that the student may be retained in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, an explanation of the student's current performance level in reading, and reference to the required adequate reading proficiency level required for promotion to 4<sup>th</sup> grade;
    - iii. An explanation of the risks of promotion and retention for a child who does not demonstrate reading proficiency by the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade
    - iv. An MSDE-approved list of supplemental reading support program options for the parent/guardian to choose from at no cost to the parent or guardian such as specific summer school programs, before or after-school tutoring, or other instructional supports
    - v. A document that captures the parent or guardians' final decision to:
      - a) Consent to the designation of retention in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, or
      - b) Choose 4<sup>th</sup>-grade promotion and consent to their student enrolling and participating in a supplemental reading support program provided by the LEA and approved by MSDE at no cost to the parent or guardian.
  - c. In the case that a school or LEA does not receive a final decision regarding retention in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade from the parent/guardians, the school must continue reaching out to parent/guardian(s) through multiple means of communication, including, but not limited to mail, email, phone calls, and, if appropriate, home visits prior to the next school year.
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- d. LEAs should develop a contingency process for situations where a parent or guardian cannot be contacted and send communication via certified mail no later than June 30<sup>th</sup> and a follow-up by July 31<sup>st</sup> stating that the child will be retained in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.
4. Beginning in the SY 2027-2028, students who remain in grade 3 must continue to receive intensive reading intervention to remedy the student's specific reading difficulty. Each LEA shall conduct a review of SRIPs for all students retained. The review shall address additional supports and services, as described in this subsection, needed to remedy the identified area(s) of reading difficulty. The district shall provide the following for students:
    - a. Access to core instruction that is aligned to the science of reading. Additional time for intervention shall not impede students' access to Tier I or core instruction.
    - b. Reading intervention services and supports to address the identified area(s) of reading difficulty, including, but not limited to more dedicated time than the previous school year in scientifically evidence-based reading instruction and intervention.
    - c. Use of reading strategies and/or programs that are scientifically evidence-based and have proven results in accelerating student reading achievement within the same school year.
    - d. Daily targeted small group reading intervention based on student needs, including explicit and systematic instruction with more detailed explanations, more extensive opportunities for guided practice, and more opportunities for error correction and feedback.
    - e. Frequently monitoring the reading progress of each student's reading skills throughout the school year and adjusting instruction according to student needs.
    - f. Before and/or after school supplemental evidence-based reading intervention delivered by a teacher or tutor with specialized training grounded in the science of reading.
    - g. A "Read at Home" plan outlined in a family reading agreement, including participation in parent/guardian training workshops and/or regular parent-guided home reading activities which are aligned to scientifically based reading research.

## IV. Timeline for Implementation

Policy Component	Timeline
MSDE provides professional learning for Maryland educators and Literacy Coaches	Beginning SY 2024-2025
MSDE provides LEAs technical assistance in designing their MTSS model	Beginning SY 2024-2025
MSDE releases the SRIP template and provides training on its use	Beginning Fall 2025
LEAs must develop and report promotion and retention policies to MSDE, that will go into effect in SY 2027-2028	September 1, 2025
LEAs submit first annual report of the number of teachers who have participated in MSDE-approved Science of Reading professional learning programs	September 15, 2025
MSDE will provide a list of reviewed instructional materials, indicating their HQIM designation for LEA consideration	Beginning SY 2025-2026
MSDE provides technical assistance on promotion policies	Winter-Spring 2025-2026
SBOE reviews the policy implementation	July 2026
LEAs submit the first annual report on the district school board's policies and procedures for student promotion and retention if substantial changes are made	September 1, 2026
LEAs implement PreK-5 MTSS Model with MSDE support (which includes SRIPs)	Beginning SY 2026-2027
LEAs implement MSDE-approved universal screeners	Beginning SY 2026-2027
Implement retention portion of Literacy Policy	Beginning SY 2027-2028

## V. Responsibilities

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### A. LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Each LEA must annually report in writing to MSDE by September 1 of each year, the following information on the prior school year:
  - a. The number and percentage of all students not promoted in grades K-3 organized by grade level and student group;
  - b. The number and percentage of all students in grades K-3 performing below grade level on local assessments organized by grade level and student group;
  - c. The total number and percentage of students who were promoted by parent/guardian consent and agreed to another support offered by the LEA;
  - d. The proposed supports and interventions delivered for students who were promoted by parent/guardian consent;
  - e. By grade level and student group, the total number and percentage of students receiving evidence-based intervention based on the reported assessment(s) by grade level;
  - f. Policies developed and LEA Board approved regarding promotion, retention, and the dissemination of information concerning SRIPs;
  - g. The total number and percentage of students in grade 3 who were promoted for good cause, by each category of good cause as specified in previous sections; and
  - h. The total number and percentage of students in grade 3 who demonstrated sufficient reading skills for promotion on an MSDE-identified additional reading assessment.
2. LEAs are responsible for maintaining an updated list of all teachers who have received adequate professional learning in the science of reading as defined by MSDE.
  - a. Districts must ensure all general education teachers, special education teachers, teachers of multilingual learners, and administrators in grades PreK-3 have received training in the science of reading by September 1 of each school year.
  - b. By September 15 of each academic year, this list shall be submitted to MSDE.

### B. MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RESPONSIBILITIES

1. MSDE shall establish a uniform format for LEAs to report the information required. The format shall be developed with input from LEAs and shall be provided to each LEA no later than 90 days prior to the annual due date.
2. MSDE shall annually compile the information required along with state-level summary information and report such information to the SBOE, the public, the Governor, and the General Assembly by November 1 of each year.

3. MSDE shall provide technical assistance to aid local school boards in implementing the literacy policy developed by LEAs.
4. MSDE will provide examples of promotion policies for consideration.
5. MSDE will review the submitted promotion policies to ensure adherence to the requirements.
6. MSDE will develop a consistent system for parental/guardian consent for promotion and retention.
7. MSDE shall provide technical assistance to LEAs around planning, scheduling, and identifying appropriate interventions for students at each grade band.
8. MSDE will create an MTSS Guidance document and professional learning series for administrators, ELA supervisors, and interventionists in grades PreK-3.
9. MSDE will provide sample parent/guardian notification letters, a format for the SRIP, as well as technical assistance and training on these tools and resources.
10. MSDE will develop an education/media campaign to increase families' and community stakeholders' knowledge about the importance of effective literacy instruction and science of reading practices from birth – 8th grade.

### **C. MARYLAND STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION RESPONSIBILITIES**

1. The SBOE shall adopt regulations to implement the requirements of this section.
2. The SBOE shall annually review the implementation of this policy including analysis of the following by district and student groups:
  - a. The number of students enrolled (PreK-3),
  - b. The number and percentage of students screened,
  - c. The number and percentage of students identified as at-risk for reading difficulty,
  - d. The number and percentage of students that received supplemental instruction, and
  - e. The number and percentage of students demonstrating adequate reading proficiency
  - f. The number and percentage of students who were promoted to grade 4 based on demonstrated reading proficiency, a good cause exemption, or by parent/guardian consent for promotion.
  - g. The number and percentage of students who were not promoted to 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

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- h. All data should be disaggregated by race, ethnicity and free and reduced lunch status (FARMS).

DRAFT

## VI. References

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### A. Laws & Regulations

1. [Literacy Standards Regulation](#)
2. [Ready to Read Act \(SB 734\)](#)
3. [Ready to Read Regulations \(COMAR 13A.03.08\)](#)
4. [Education Article 7-202](#)
5. [Maryland Blueprint Transitional Supplemental Instruction \(TSI\)](#)

### B. Board Policies and Resolutions

1. [State Board Resolution 24-01 – Statewide Adoption and Implementation of the Science of Reading](#)
2. [Maryland College and Career-Readiness Standards for ELA](#)
3. [Maryland Early Learning Standards](#)



OFFICE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

# Maryland State Department of Education Comprehensive PreK to 3 Literacy Policy Update

October 22, 2024

Presented By | Dr. Deann Collins, Deputy Superintendent  
Dr. Tenette Smith, Executive Director of Literacy Programs and Initiatives







## Presentation Outline

1. Literacy Policy Stakeholder Engagement & Feedback Process
2. Making the Case: Significant Improvements for Literacy
3. Literacy Policy Fundamental Principles and Major Revisions
4. Update on Support and Guidance
5. Implementation Timeline and Next Steps

# Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback Process

Timeline	Activity
January 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Resolution (24-01) adopted</b> by the State Board and tasked the State Superintendent of Schools with <b>drafting a comprehensive literacy policy aligned with the Science of Reading</b> for the Board's approval.</li> </ul>
June-July 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>First Draft of Literacy Policy released</b> for public comment</li> <li>• Meetings held with local education agency (LEA) staff, various community organizations, and the State Literacy Advisory Panel to discuss the policy and gather feedback</li> <li>• Information and updates provided to the Education Policy Committee and State Board</li> </ul>
July-August 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Version two of the Literacy Policy released</b> for public comment</li> <li>• Meetings held with LEA staff, community organizations, and the State Literacy Advisory Panel for feedback</li> <li>• Information and updates provided to the Education Policy Committee and State Board</li> </ul>
August-September 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Version three of the Literacy Policy released</b> for public comment</li> <li>• Meetings held with LEA staff, community organizations, and the State Literacy Advisory Panel for feedback</li> <li>• Information and updates provided to the Education Policy Committee and State Board</li> <li>• <b>Public Hearing</b> on the proposed Literacy Policy <b>conducted during the August 27<sup>th</sup> Board meeting</b></li> </ul>
October 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Version four of the Literacy Policy released</b></li> <li>• Information and updates provided to the Education Policy Committee and State Board, and <b>request for adoption</b></li> </ul>

## An Urgent Need for Action to Improve Literacy Proficiency

- Since 2013, Maryland's reading performance has declined, falling from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 41<sup>st</sup> in the nation on the Grade 4 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Assessment.
- Maryland's 2024 LEA reading screening data and Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) English/Language Arts data demonstrates an urgent need to address students' reading deficiencies, especially for students living in poverty, multilingual learners, and students of color.

The goal of the Comprehensive Pre-K to 3 Literacy Policy is to ensure **equitable** access to quality literacy instruction that meets the needs of **all** students *regardless* of the color of their skin, what other languages they speak, or the zip code in which they live.

## Decision Point

The Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) Office of Literacy Programs and Initiatives is requesting the adoption of the Comprehensive PreK to 3 Literacy Policy.

# Ready to Read Data: Students identified for being at risk for reading difficulties

Percentage of students identified for being at risk for reading difficulties by grade\*

K		Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3	
BOY	EOY	BOY	EOY	BOY	EOY	BOY	EOY
<b>Caroline</b>		<b>Caroline</b>		<b>Talbot</b>		<b>Caroline</b>	
70.2% (259)	29.5% (116)	63.1% (233)	44.0% (169)	56.6% (181)	51.2% (162)	61.8% (246)	53.6% (216)
<b>Dorchester</b>		<b>Dorchester</b>		<b>Cecil</b>		<b>Dorchester</b>	
66.8% (219)	38.7% (128)	59.5% (175)	43.1% (125)	55.0% (573)	58.0% (606)	61.1% (193)	60.7% (193)
<b>Baltimore County</b>		<b>Cecil</b>		<b>Dorchester</b>		<b>Talbot</b>	
49.4% (3,671)	34.8% (2,602)	58.8% (607)	58.4% (603)	54.8% (198)	49.9% (177)	50.6% (133)	47.4% (126)

\*The three LEAs with the highest percentages at the beginning of the year in each grade are shown.

Source: MSDE calculation of LEA Ready to Read data collection. Percentages calculated by dividing the number of students identified for being at risk by the number of students enrolled. Numbers in parentheses refers to students identified. Percentages are based on the respective time of year and therefore may not equate. BOY=beginning of year; EOY=end of year.



# ELA Proficiency by Race

Black and Hispanic students had the lowest percent proficient in MCAP ELA across all tested grades in 2024.

ELA Percent Proficient by Race/Ethnicity, 2024

Test Grade	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black/African American	Hispanic /Latino	Two or more races	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	White	All
3	37.4	70.9	34.7	29.4	54.1	59.2	63.0	46.5
4	40.0	73.3	36.3	32.0	58.1	48.7	67.4	49.3
5	38.7	72.9	31.8	28.3	52.0	53.1	60.1	44.2
6	36.7	74.2	35.9	31.3	54.9	51.2	64.6	47.9
7	46.1	75.3	36.7	32.4	55.7	60.6	64.6	48.6
8	43.2	75.2	33.4	29.0	54.3	51.8	63.5	46.2
10	54.7	81.1	43.2	39.4	63.4	53.4	71.9	55.3

## Performance Level 1 by Race/Ethnicity

Among a cohort of students, more Black and Hispanic students scored at MCAP ELA Performance **Level 1** over the last two years, while Asian and white students remained relatively unchanged.

Cohort ELA Performance Level 1 Percent by Race/Ethnicity

Year	Grade	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black/African American	Hispanic/Latino	Two or more races	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	White	All
2022	3	11.0	3.4	15.5	15.7	7.9	5.8	5.5	10.9
2023	4	9.7	2.6	15.2	15.7	7.1	10.5	4.4	10.4
2024	5	13.1	3.3	19.2	18.4	8.7	14.0	5.9	12.9
Change		2.1	-0.1	3.8	2.6	0.8	8.1	0.4	2.0

Numbers are percent of a cohort of students starting in grade 3 and only include students with tests in all three years.

# Summary of Revisions to Comprehensive PreK to 3 Literacy Policy

Feedback	Revisions
Clarify Inclusion of All Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft policy supports all students in Pre-K to 3</li> <li>• Added more language about Pre-K instruction</li> </ul>
Clarification on guidance, technical assistance, and training provided by MSDE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarifies that MSDE will assist LEAs in implementing the policy by providing guidance, Technical Assistance, and training as it pertains to Multitiered System of Support (MTSS), promotion policies, and SRIPs</li> </ul>
Focus on Tier 1/Core Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on quality and robust core instruction</li> </ul>
Focus on (MTSS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides specific criteria for reading intervention programs for students in grades K-3</li> <li>• Defines Tiers I, II, and III instruction more clearly</li> </ul>



# Summary of Revisions to Comprehensive PreK to 3 Literacy Policy

Feedback	Revisions
Provide multiple pathways for students to transition from grade to grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identified additional options to ensure adequate supports provided to help students progress to the next grade level</li><li>• Provided opportunities for LEAs to use multiple measures to determine readiness</li></ul>
Responsibilities for the LEA, MSDE and SBOE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Added more descriptive language to ensure transparency of expectations for ALL</li></ul>
Parental notification and additional supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide LEAs with multiple pathways to support parents and students</li></ul>
More time needed to implement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Developed an updated timeline and multi-step pathway for students, parents and LEAs to support all students</li></ul>

# Enhancing Pre-K Teachers' Professional Learning in the Science of Reading

**Integrate Science of Reading into Early Learning Content Collaboratives:** Established statewide Early Learning Content Collaborative to foster collaboration among Pre-K providers. MSDE will embed professional learning on science of reading and developmentally appropriate practices.

**Collaboration with Maryland Higher Education Commission:** Partner with the Maryland Higher Education Commission to ensure new educators and the incumbent childcare workforce receive comprehensive training on science of reading in teacher preparation and ongoing professional development.

**Ongoing Virtual Professional Learning and Coaching:** Provide access to Early Learning Modules to support Pre-K teachers with the implementation of the Early Learning Standards, Language and Literacy Domain. In addition, MSDE will pilot ongoing virtual coaching to support classroom implementation.

**Family Engagement:** Develop easy-to-understand one-pagers in multiple languages for families, providing guidance on the Early Learning Standards and examples of how they can support literacy development at home. Pre-K teachers can partner with families to support foundational language and literacy skills in a developmentally appropriate way.

<https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/ece/> (See the Maryland Early Learning Standards: Language and Literacy Domain.)

## Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant (CLSD)

Authorized under Sections 2222-2225 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the purpose of the CLSD discretionary grants is to create a **comprehensive literacy program** to advance literacy skills, including pre-literacy skills, reading, and writing, for children **from birth through grade 12**, with **an emphasis on disadvantaged children, including children living in poverty, English learners, and children with disabilities.**

### MSDE Literacy Vision:

The vision of the Maryland State Department of Education Office Literacy Programs and Initiatives is to create and communicate a comprehensive state-level system of support to increase administrator literacy leadership, and teacher efficacy in literacy instruction thereby increasing student literacy outcomes.

**Maryland Awarded Funds:** \$40.1M

**Milestone One:** \$3.8M awarded to approved LEAs by March 2025

**Project Period:** 60 months (5 years)

**Striving Readers  
Comprehensive  
Literacy (SRCL)  
Grant**



U.S. Department of Education

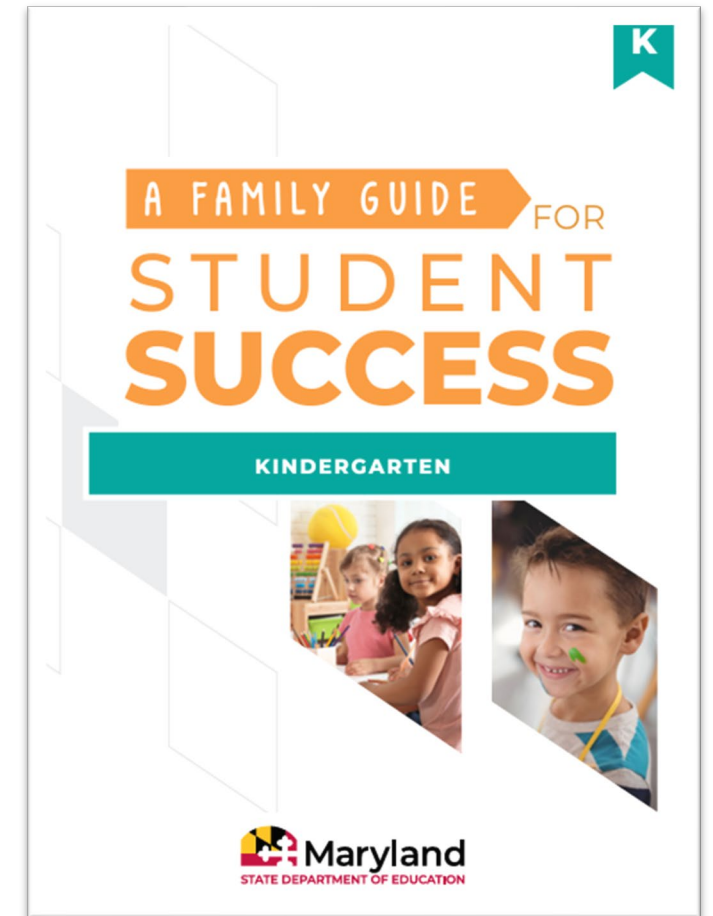
Striving Readers Grant Implementation Report: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/2024003/>

## CLSD Grant Subgranting to LEAs

- **SEAs must subgrant at least 95% of grant funds to “eligible entities,”** which are defined as an entity that consists of—
  - (a) One or more **LEAs that serve a high percentage of high-need schools**
  - and—
    - (1) Have the highest number or proportion of children who are counted under section 1124(c) of the ESEA, in comparison to other LEAs in the State;
    - (2) Are among the LEAs in the State with the highest number or percentages of children reading or writing below grade level, based on the most currently available State academic assessment data under section 1111(b)(2) of the ESEA; or
    - (3) Serve a significant number or percentage of schools that are implementing comprehensive support and improvement activities and targeted support and improvement activities under section 1111(d) of the ESEA;

## Parent Support and Guidance

- The MSDE literacy team has started the process in collaboration with the communications team to develop an education/media campaign to increase families' and community stakeholders' knowledge about the importance of effective literacy instruction and science of reading practices from birth – 8th grade.
- Utilizing initial input from stakeholders who have expertise with family engagement, the MSDE literacy team has drafted MD branded family guides that give practical suggestions for home support, by grade level (birth – 8th grade) that includes:
  - Family-friendly definitions and examples of commonly used science of reading terms
  - Tips for parents including "Questions to ask your child's teacher"
  - Home activities around core learning (Ex. letter knowledge, working with sounds, vocabulary, etc.)



The MSDE literacy team plans to connect with additional stakeholders for input and feedback regarding parent support and guidance prior to the release of any resources.

# Implementation Timeline and Next Steps

Policy Component	Timeline
Professional Learning and Technical Assistance to LEAs, and educators (SoR, MTSS, and Student Reading Improvement Plan)	Beginning SY 2024-2025
Development of policies by LEAs –Technical assistance and resources	Beginning Fall 2025
SBOE Review of Policy implementation and LEA reports	Summer 2026
HQIM reviews and designations completed by MSDE	Fall 2026
LEAs implement Pre-K-5 MTSS Model with MSDE support (which includes SRIPs and MSDE-approved Universal Screeners)	Beginning SY 2026-2027
Implement ALL components of Literacy Policy	Beginning SY 2027-2028

# What's Next?

MSDE Support for Parents and LEAs	Overall MSDE Support
<p>Continue to develop parent resources for SoR and on screener reports</p>	<p>Hire a CLSD Grants Manager</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and develop a subgrantee application process/review methodology</li> <li>• Provide LEAs TA on the subgrantee application process</li> </ul>
<p>Begin filming small PSA-type snippets for parents</p>	<p>Develop and submit draft revisions to COMAR that align with the key components of the Literacy Policy</p>
<p>Develop and provide MTSS-Professional Learning and Literacy Leadership courses</p>	<p>Present revised COMAR regulations to the State Board Education Policy Committee</p>
<p>Begin statewide parent night events to help answer questions about SoR and other state initiatives</p>	<p>Continue to collaborate internally to ensure alignment with other state initiatives and supports for schools and districts</p>

# Questions and Discussion



# Appendix

## **Goal #1: Increase educator capacity to deliver research-based literacy instruction.**

**1.1 Supporting LEA-based Literacy Coaches:** Leverage state and CLSD funds to develop, deliver, and evaluate high-quality PL experiences tailored for educators across Maryland

**1.2 Signaling and Guidance from MSDE:** The tasks that MSDE must undertake to signal the importance of this work and provide overarching guidance to the 24 LEAs in Maryland.

**1.3 Creating a Cadre of Informed Literacy Administrators:** Provide PL for district literacy decisions makers and provide an opportunity to bring leaders together to ensure that literacy remains a key-focus in educational decision-making.

**1.4 Supporting Early Childhood Education centers with the development of a PL plan**

**1.5 Strengthening Educator Preparation Programs:** Incorporating IHEs into professional learning initiatives to strengthen EPPs

## **Goal #2: Increase access to effective literacy programming for all students with priority consideration given to LEAs with a high population of underserved students.**

**2.1 Developing or expanding literacy coaching models:** Develop or expand LEA literacy coaches (K-12)

**2.2 Supporting students with identified learning needs:** Refining/Developing LEA MTSS models (hiring, scheduling, etc.)

**2.3 Supporting Multilingual Learners:** LEAs procuring and delivering literacy instruction to meet the specific needs of MLs

**2.4 Implementing a Comprehensive Professional Learning Model:** LEAs implement an overarching PL model for teachers and literacy leaders (birth-grade 12) (programs, vendors, teacher pay, etc.)

**2.5 Adopting and Implementing HQIM:** LEAs can use funds to adopt and implement a new HQIM that is approved by MSDE HQIM initiative

**2.6 Developing LEA Partnerships with Institutions of Higher Ed:** LEA/EPP partnership - EPPs share syllabi with LEA and LEA provides practicum opportunities

**2.7 Increasing Equity in Gifted/Talented Advanced Programs:** Increase equity in GT programs and provide targeted enrichment support through summer and school-year enrichment programs

**2.8 Management of CLSD Grant:** Sub-granting, TA, Hiring, etc.

STUDENT GROUP	% WHO READ PROFICIENTLY IN 4TH GRADE
Asian students	54%
Caucasian students	47%
ALL STUDENTS	31%
Black students	20%
Hispanic students	15%
Students eligible for National School Lunch Program	14%
Students with disabilities	12%
English language learners	6%