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In 1998, I testified before the legislature to pass a bill that would ensure that all elementary teachers in our colleges would have at least four courses in reading, in order to be eligible to become certified Maryland teachers. The bill passed.

I never thought that 16 years later I would be sitting before you at MSDE talking about those four courses. The courses are supposedly approved by MSDE, but many do not follow the “science of reading”. Therefore, teachers in MD are graduating with the required four reading courses, but many of these courses do not provide the knowledge base for teachers to teach children how to read, in the ways that we know actually work. When one examines our literacy rates in Maryland, it is clear that this lack of training is at least one of the variables affecting our very poor outcomes. One look at the recent NAEP scores tells the story---Maryland’s reading scores went down again. I am sure that you know this already.

In the year 2000, the National Reading Panel at the National Institutes of Health examined 100,000 studies about reading that had been generated over the prior 30 years. All of the articles that did not follow the scientific method were tossed out. What remained was considered to be the foundational principles of the “science of reading”. These scientific findings clarified that children needed to learn the steps of reading in order, starting with oral phonological awareness (understanding sounds without letters). The findings indicated that they then needed to learn systematic, synthetic (“put-together” not “pull-apart”) phonetic decoding skills. After students learned how to handle the sounds and the letters of the language, the results of the studies showed that they then needed extensive oral fluency practice to become fast and accurate decoders. Next, they needed to learn how to orally analyze and discuss the vocabulary words in their texts. Lastly, they needed to acquire specific strategies for text comprehension.

Having visited thousands of classrooms in almost every county in the State of Maryland, I can tell you that many teachers are not following these steps. The Common Core Standards include very few skills for phonological awareness, systematic, synthetic phonics, or oral fluency training; the bulk of the standards deal with oral vocabulary and text comprehension practice.

Over the last 4 decades, I have had the privilege of presenting workshops to teachers at Goucher College, University of Maryland College Park, Loyola University MD, Frostburg University, and Towson University. My own Orton-Gillingham course is an MSDE-approved course at which teachers receive three in-service credits. I have trained about 3,000 teachers in Maryland at this time. I get the chance to talk to so many teachers in the field and in teacher training programs, and I am keenly aware that these teachers are often not being trained with the “science of reading” in mind. We need to tighten up these four reading courses at every one of our colleges, and improve our reading scores, once and for all.

*Testimony to Maryland State Department of Education
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