

# **Testimony to the Maryland State Board of Education**

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I come here today as a member of Right to Read-Maryland.

I have become involved with this organization because I'm passionately concerned that the children of Maryland are not receiving the best possible education in learning to read. Testing scores provided by the National Assessment of Educational Progress tell the story. At all levels, an alarming number of the children in Maryland are not proficient in reading. Once behind, remediation is expensive and the majority of children do not catch up.

To help solve this problem, I became a member of the MSDE Work Group that is charged with revising the four mandated reading courses. A dozen or more professionals are working diligently and I believe the courses will embody the most recent research on scientifically-based practices. But there is a problem.

Teachers are asked to take the courses but there is no fail-safe to show that they have learned this information about the teaching of reading. If we step back a moment and look at other professionals, they are all required to pass an examination to certify competency. So it should be with elementary classroom teachers, reading teachers, and reading specialists. Look at the training of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, lawyers, doctors, CPAs just to name a few. To assure the fidelity of teacher education, a test of competency is necessary.

Over the course of my career, I have taught at Johns Hopkins University, Loyola University, and Goucher College for a total of more than twenty years. I have been shocked at what our teachers do not know at the graduate level: kinds of syllables, syllable division rules, the origins of the English language, and very basic diagnostic skills to ascertain exactly why a student is struggling with reading. Perhaps the example of this issue that has become a leitmotif of why it is so difficult to require a foundations of reading test happened in my graduate school experience. When I was asked to supervise student teachers as part of my fellowship at Harvard University. When I questioned a professor about why the students lacked a fundamental knowledge of the teaching of reading, it was explained that these student teachers were bright enough to pick up the teaching skills when needed. I have thought about this statement in terms of other professions. Ladies and gentlemen, we will skip the unit on setting broken bones. We will skip the unit on concussions.

Maryland is behind a dozen other states that require a foundations of reading test for all pre-service elementary teachers. MSDE has approved of a foundations of reading test designed by ETS as an alternative to the four courses. Instead of using it as an alternative, it should be required of all elementary teachers. In fact, every teacher at the elementary level is a teacher of reading if we want to create a literate workforce capable of competing internationally.