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LETTER

Literacy Is a Civil Right

July 17, 2018

To the Editor:

I read with interest the article in Education Week where the court ruled in Gary B. v. Snyder that the U.S. Constitution does not guarantee literacy (Curriculum Matters blog, edweek.org, July 2, 2018). I am the founder of Right to Read-Maryland, a coalition of educators and organizations who have the common goal of improving teacher preparation as it specifically relates to reading skills acquisition for all. We believe that literacy is a civil right.

Our Declaration of Independence guaranteed the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." In 1776, the common meaning of happiness was prosperity, thriving, and well-being. According to Aristotle, happiness is the final end, how well you have lived up to your potential as a human being. If we accept these definitions of "happiness," we can argue that literacy is a right because without being able to read, one cannot thrive or reach one's potential in life.

There is a crisis in literacy in the United States, as evidenced by scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In 2000, the National Reading Panel recommended practices for effective reading instruction after the completion of over 100,000 research studies. The fact that many of our institutions of higher education are still not teaching this information with fidelity is outrageous.

Every state should require a rigorous test of evidence-based foundations of reading as a requirement for certification of all elementary teachers reading specialists, and special education teachers. We need to awaken our citizens to the need for meaningful action, which is long overdue.

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