

Senate Testimony SB126 Early Literacy and Dyslexia Practices

I am an Anne Arundel county resident and parent of a student with reading difficulties. Our child has been raised in Crofton, MD with all the benefits of an upper middle class family: attending a high quality preschool and growing up in a household full of children's literature. Yet, when we started Kindergarten with AACPS our child had not mastered his letters or letter sounds. Our Kindergarten teacher first notified us that our child had difficulties with phonological awareness, or the recognition of individual sounds in words. Our child received weekly lists of sight words from his school to memorize but could not recognize the word cat as being made up of three letters, c-a-t. When we requested additional reading supports last January, our child was placed in a Response-to-Intervention (RTI), a progress-monitoring program that is the equivalent of a wait-and-see. When the pandemic hit last March, our child was still reading at a Fountas and Pinnell level A, the lowest rating for prereaders. Last month AACPS screened all Kindergarteners and 1st graders for reading difficulties students for reading difficulties in accordance with the 2019 Ready to Read Act. Although these screening results have not yet been released to parents, we were informed by our school just last week that we were admitted into the reading intervention program, nearly a year after we first requested it.

Early screening and intervention is critical for remediating literacy problems. If a child cannot read by the 3rd grade, they are more likely to have reading problems for the rest of their lives and/or end up in the criminal justice system. I ask you: If this was the experience of an upper middle class family in our county, what hope can a child attending one of our Title 1 schools have of obtaining functional literacy? Our poorest families have been the hardest hit by this pandemic and are least likely to be able to pay for private assessments and tutoring. We are facing an epidemic of illiteracy in our county and our state. We must act to enable the MSDE to establish a list of best practices for assessment and remediation of reading difficulties. The current piecemeal approach with each county having its own implementation will not suffice. I urge you in the strongest terms to support this bill.

Sincerely,
Corinne Emerson
Crofton, MD