



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 126
State Department of Education - Early Literacy and Dyslexia Practices - Guidance and
Assistance
Ways and Means Committee
January 27, 2021

The Maryland State Conference (MSC) of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) strongly supports Senate Bill 126 requiring the state of Maryland to provide Maryland school districts with a roadmap to improve early literacy instruction and dyslexia interventions that would create support materials to guide implementation of the Ready to Read Act.

The NAACP works to ensure that all disadvantaged students and students of color are on the path to college or a successful career by ensuring access to great teaching, equitable resources, and a challenging curriculum. We are dedicated to eliminating the severe racial inequities that continue to plague our education system and impact the way in which all programmatic decisions are reviewed and challenged. Literacy is a civic right and an essential gateway to students' success. Our ultimate goal is that every student of color receives a quality public education that prepares young people to be contributing members of our democracy. To achieve these goals, the NAACP Maryland State Conference advocates around a four-prong strategy to improve educational achievement for disadvantaged students by:

- Increasing Resource Equity: Target funds to neediest kids
- Ensuring College & Career Readiness: A path to success after graduation for all students
- Improving Teaching: Growing our own great teachers now in underserved communities
- Improving Discipline: Eliminate zero tolerance; keep kids in school

It is for this reason that we urge the State of Maryland to provide Maryland school districts with a roadmap grounded in the science of literacy instruction and evidenced-based practices for dyslexia interventions designed to guide implementation of the Ready to Read Act. In the Nation's Report Card, the percentage of students in Maryland in Grade 4 who performed at or above the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Proficient level was 35 percent in 2019. Furthermore, a highly disproportionate number of our Black and Brown students with learning disabilities, lack the basic literacy skills needed to achieve success in school, post-secondary education, gainful employment, and meaningful civic engagement. In effect, this literacy gap may serve as a consequential stepping stone to the school-to-prison pipeline where we see 85 percent of juvenile offenders in the U.S. have trouble with reading, according to the

Literacy Project Foundation. This should be an alarming, warning sign that our students need and deserve a coordinated state-wide vision and action plan to reimagine literacy instruction while working hand-in-hand with teacher preparation programs at our Schools of Education.

In the implementation of this legislation, the NAACP MSC joins the Decoding Dyslexia Maryland Advocates in calling upon the General Assembly to:

- 1) Require the State Department of Education to establish, by October 1, 2021, a stakeholder advisory group to develop a reading and dyslexia handbook to guide local school systems in the implementation of best practices for early literacy and dyslexia;
- 2) Require the development of tools and materials to address the needs of at-risk and struggling students with dyslexia;
- 3) Require a completed handbook be made available to the public by June 1, 2022;
- 4) Require the Department to update the handbook every three years

Support for the Maryland Reading and Dyslexia Handbook will:

- Create a stakeholder advisory group of educators & dyslexia community members to collaborate on a Reading & Dyslexia Handbook.
- Provide guidance for general & special educators and families on best practices to identify & remediate students with dyslexia and reading difficulties.
- Develop a definitive, publicly available resource for educators and families on reading and writing assessment, instruction, intervention, and accommodations for use in the classroom and in the home;
- Allow Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to expand an existing position with the department to serve as a dyslexia point of contact, an important cost-saving measure that allows the department to leverage existing resources and;
- Enumerate evidence-based components/elements needed for instruction, interventions, professional learning, and assessment/screening.

Equity should be a means of providing access, opportunities, and supports needed to help students reach their full potential by removing barriers to success. Literacy is liberation and the foundation for all students to thrive. For these reasons, The Maryland State Conference urges the committees to issue favorable reports for Senate Bill 126.

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