

My name is Byron Johns, and I am the Education Chair for the Montgomery County Maryland branch of the NAACP and lead the NAACP Parents' Council, recruiting and leading Representatives in each of the district's 211 schools advocating for Black and other minorities to have access to equitable educational opportunities. I am also co-founder of the Black and Brown Coalition for Educational Equity and Excellence (BBC), working with Identity, a Latino advocacy organization, to dismantle systemic barriers in Education that disadvantage Black, Brown and children of low-income families.

Early literacy for students of color is critically important to education equity

The BBC and Parents' Council have focused advocacy on early literacy as one of our top priorities. In MCPS, 2 out of 3 Black, and 3 out of 4 Brown/Latinx children are not Kindergarten Ready when they start formal schooling. Reading is the foundational skill for all other subjects which is why schools teach children to 'learn to read' from Kindergarten to 3rd grade, and 'read to learn' after 3rd grade. By Middle School, more than 6 years later, nearly 1 in 2 Black students and 3 in 4 Brown students **do not meet** Literacy Proficiency standards. Maryland ranks 40th in the United States in reading with just **30% of fourth-grade students** and **33% of eighth-grade students** At or Above Proficient based on the Natl Assessment for Educational Proficiency test (NAEP).

With so many children not starting with or gaining proficiency in reading skills, it is more critical than ever that resource investments and effective methods based on the Science of Reading immediately be one of all Maryland school district's highest priorities. Solutions that address the scale of this deficiency include, 1) aligning our teacher preparation standards to the science of reading, and 2) empowering parents and caregivers with tools and materials that enable them to support developmental reading skills.

We support passage of HB475 which will promote development and deployment of tools and materials aligned to the Science of Reading.

