

Commentary to the Maryland State Board of Education - July 18, 2017

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Co-Chair Right to Read – Maryland

Good afternoon, my name is Cheri Crow and I come before you today on behalf of Right to Read Maryland. Our mission is to assure that teacher training programs are aligned with what we know about the science of reading, so that all teachers have the knowledge and tools to teach reading effectively.

I have been an educator for over thirty-five years, teaching students from grade one to twelve, mentoring teachers and leading professional development. It wasn't until my own daughter was struggling to learn to read, that I received the knowledge I needed to be a truly effective teacher and professional. I took an Orton/Gillingham course in which I learned the code of the English language. That was twelve years into my career.

We know from the data on reading proficiency that the methods we are using to teach students to read are not effective enough, and we are not going to improve the education of our children until we change the way we train our teachers. The results of the extensive research reviewed by the National Reading Panel revealed that the most effective way to teach reading was to include systematically taught phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development and comprehension skills. Almost two decades later, Maryland is still not teaching this essential knowledge to those graduating from our college teaching programs.

Dr. Louisa Moats professor, psychologist, and researcher, shares her experience with teaching teachers the code of our language:

"I point out all the statistics on how hard it is for people to learn (to read). Then I teach them explicitly about the speech sounds and the symbols that we use to spell them and for most people it's a total 'aha.' I've never had anyone tell me it's irrelevant. I've had thousands of people tell me they should have learned this in their licensing process. I have people telling me for the first time that they understand, and that the code system makes some sense. They never knew how to explain these things to their kids."*

Louisa Moats is not alone in this experience. We have educators in Maryland like Dr. Fran Bowman, Dr. Ann Bain, who are training thousands of seasoned teachers to understand the code of our language. Over and over, the teachers ask, "why wasn't I taught this during my college coursework?"

Right to Read Maryland is part of the MSDE Work Group currently tasked with improving the four mandated reading courses taught in Maryland universities. We need to make certain that we use what we know about the science of reading to ensure these courses are teaching the code of our language. Additionally, we need to make certain that the instructors at the university level are also trained in this code, so that they can properly instruct our future reading teachers.

But we must go one step further to ensure that our students have competent reading teachers in their primary classrooms by assessing the teachers' knowledge of the fundamentals of reading instruction. MSDE has already approved the Foundations of Reading Test created by ETS; but the test is used only if a teacher has opted out of the four reading courses. To ensure that those who are teaching students to read are qualified to do so, we need to use the Foundations of Reading test for all those seeking teacher certification as K-5 educators.

We need to provide our current K-5 classroom teachers professional development including the same tenets of our language code if we hope to change our reading proficiency scores. Every year in a child's education is significant. We have the knowledge to improve teacher preparation in Maryland by setting standards for the delivery of evidence-based reading instruction for preservice teachers, as well as by requiring the assessment of this knowledge for certification. Let's use this knowledge and improve education for all students in Maryland.

Thank you for your time and attention.

*From an interview with Louisa Moats, Children of the Code, www.childrenofthecode.org