



Honorable Members of the House Education Subcommittee on Early Learning and Innovation:

Thank you for your consideration of a comprehensive policy that will improve literacy in Virginia.

From kindergarten through third grade, children are learning to read. Then in fourth grade, they transition to use reading to learn. A comprehensive state-led early literacy policy can ensure all students enter fourth grade with the foundational reading skills they need to learn, graduate, and succeed.

In fact, children who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out or fail to graduate from high school, according to a report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For poor black and Hispanic students, that likelihood doubles. Reading is the gateway to learning. If our children cannot read, they do not stand a chance for a successful future.

FACT: Students transition from learning to read, to reading to learn in 3rd grade. Learn more about early literacy at: ExcelinEd.org

Strong readers are...
better at learning concepts and skills and earn higher grades.

More likely to...
graduate high school and attend college.

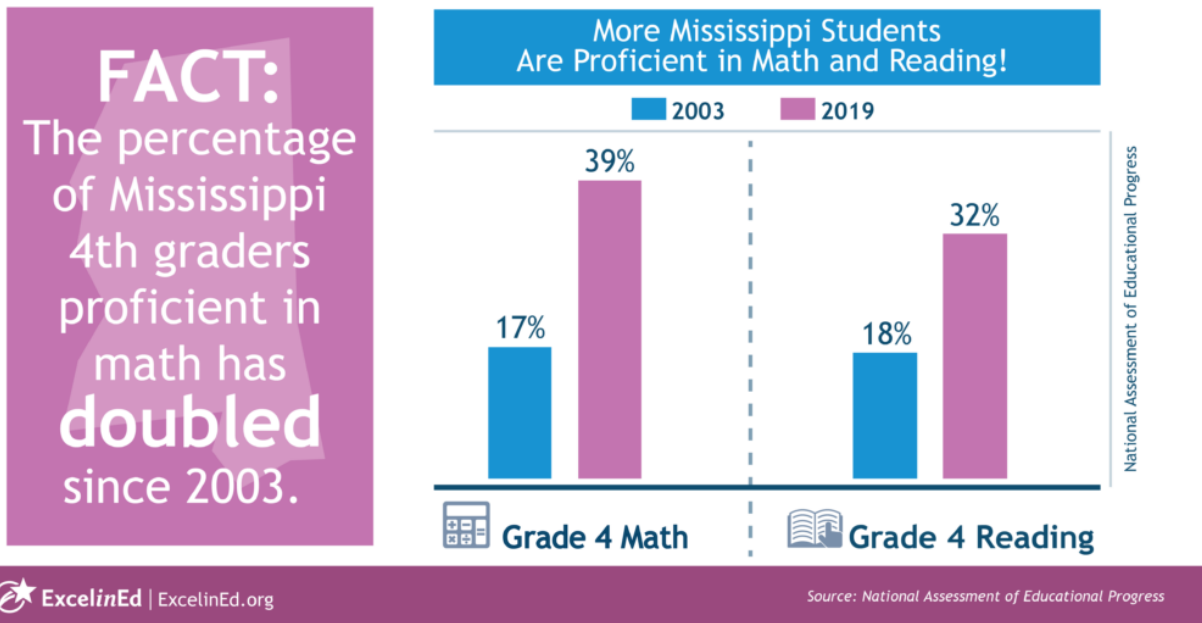
More likely to...
be employed as young adults.

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The infographic is set against a background of purple and pink geometric shapes. It features a central column of text boxes connected by dotted lines to icons on the right. The icons include a document with 'A+', a graduation cap, and a briefcase. The footer contains the ExcelinEd logo and website information.

As you may know, several states have passed comprehensive early literacy bills similar to HB 319 and have seen dramatic impacts on their students. Mississippi – a rockstar in this space – passed a comprehensive early literacy law back in 2013 and implementation of the program led the state to see the most gains in the country on the 2019 administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Mississippi made an important statement with the passage of its comprehensive law, and it is having a profound impact: **the science of reading is critical**. Nearly all kids can become strong readers if they are taught the right way. Research

shows that most children—including those identified with reading difficulties—learn to read when teachers deliver explicit and systematic instruction aligned with the science of reading.



As you consider this policy to create a state-led effort that will spur improvements in academic achievement and literacy, it is important to focus on the following fundamental principles:

- 1) *Create Individualized Pathways to Literacy* – Early literacy screenings and regular progress monitoring inform individual student literacy plans. HB 319 requires student to be regularly screened and assessed for reading difficulties and intervention supports for struggling readers.
- 2) *Invest in Teachers & Engage Families* – Teachers must be equipped to deliver scientifically-based reading instruction. HB 319 attacks this issue through professional development and reading coach support for current teachers and administrators and through teacher prep and licensure requirements for future educators. HB 319 also appropriately ensures that parents are equipped and empowered to support their child through parent notification and engagement.
- 3) *Ground all Policies in the Science of Reading* – Explicit and systematic instruction should include phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The “science of reading” is a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing that has been conducted over the last five decades across the world, and it is derived from thousands of studies conducted in multiple languages. The science of reading has culminated in a preponderance of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop; why



some have difficulty; and how we can most effectively assess and teach and, therefore, improve student outcomes through prevention of and intervention for reading difficulties. Teacher preparation, teacher professional development, high-quality curriculum, screeners, and student interventions must all be grounded in the science.

A person's ability to read is a critical predictor of educational and lifelong success. A strong comprehensive reading program, beginning in kindergarten and continuing into the third grade and beyond, gives students the best possible chance to maximize their education. As state leaders, you can support this approach by implementing reading-to-learn policies. Over time, this prioritization of early literacy will save state dollars on remedial instruction and dropout prevention in the later grades and ensure that students have the best chance for a successful life in school in beyond.

Thank you again for your consideration and commitment to the success of Virginia students.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ashley D. M." followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line.

Ashley DeMauro Mullins
Senior Legislative Director
ExcelinEd in Action