

POSITION STATEMENT

Adopted by Virginia PTA Board of Directors



Virginia
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LITERACY INSTRUCTION

Virginia PTA recognizes that early literacy development is an essential building block to a student's future language development and educational success.

Beginning in fourth grade students use reading to learn other subjects, and therefore, mastery of reading becomes a critical component in their ability to keep up academically. Studies have shown that children who cannot read at grade level by the start of fourth grade are four times less likely to graduate on-time compared to their grade-level peers, which can reduce their earnings potential and opportunities for success.

Nationally, the percentage of fourth graders in public school who can read proficiently has hovered at around 35 percent. Since 2002, the percentage of Virginia's fourth graders who are reading at or above a proficient level has hovered around 38 percent.¹

The COVID pandemic has directly impacted the ability of students to read proficiency by fourth grade. In Spring 2021, Virginia's early literacy screener, Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), identified 82,000 K-2 students with reading skills below benchmark, an increase of about 36,800 students, or 1.8 times as many students, compared to Spring 2019, pre-COVID. Likewise, in the 2018-2019 school year, 30% of Virginia's third graders failed the Reading SOL and by the end of the 2021 school year, that number increased to almost 39%. The deficits in reading proficiency are more pronounced for economically disadvantaged students, English learners, and Black students, and Hispanic students.

Studies indicate that explicit, systematic instruction in the following five essential components of early reading instruction are key to reading success:

- **Phonemic awareness:** Understanding that words are composed of sounds
- **Phonics:** Students learn to break-down, decode or sound-out a word
- **Fluency:** Ability to read accurately, rapidly, and with expression
- **Vocabulary:** The range of words a student understands orally and in print
- **Reading Comprehension:** Process of determining meaning of the text

Despite widespread agreement by reading experts and effort by the Virginia Department of Education and many local school divisions, there has not been a systemic shift in Virginia to train teachers in scientifically-supported reading methods, nor the adoption of an explicit and systematic method of reading instruction.

Since 2015, Virginia PTA has advocated for evidence-based reading remediation programs, implemented with fidelity, to improve reading instruction for students with dyslexia.

Virginia PTA re-affirms our long-standing support for the importance of early literacy programs and urges the adoption a comprehensive statewide approach to literacy that relies on scientifically-based reading research and uses evidence-based practices for instruction, intervention, and assessments.

- Virginia PTA urges the General Assembly to support scientifically based reading instruction, screening and intervention methods that are evidence-based, explicit, systematic, sequential, and cumulative.
- Virginia PTA supports funding for teacher preparation programs, and professional development that enables teachers to migrate to teaching foundational, evidence based early literacy skills in a systematic, explicit, and cumulative way.
- Virginia PTA supports funding for division level literacy coaches support to teachers, reading specialists and administrators with modeling evidence-based literacy instruction; developing and implementing an effective school-wide literacy plan, and implementing individualized reading plans for students who score below benchmark on the state-supported literacy screener.
- Virginia PTA urges the Department of Education to develop a resource bank that provides parents and caregivers with tools and resources to assist their student with scientifically-based reading instruction and to understand reading assessment results and intervention techniques.
- Virginia PTA supports data collection and transparent reporting plans on key literacy measures within the School Quality Profiles.
- Virginia PTA is committed to helping families support their child’s development of literacy skills and encourage a love of reading. Virginia PTA encourages all PTAs to share literacy resources with their school communities.

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Virginia PTA Position Statements are adopted by the Virginia PTA Board of Directors and are official documents based on our mission, research and/or previous resolutions or positions of either Virginia PTA or National PTA. Position Statements outline the opinion, will, or intent of the association to address a current statewide situation or concern that affects children and youth and which requires statewide or national attention and action to address the issue.