

Testimony of the Maine Council for English Language Arts

LD 324, An Act to Increase Reading Proficiency in Public Schools

Submitted to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
May 15, 2025



Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

My name is Patti Forster, and I am the President of the Maine Council for English Language Arts (MCELA), a professional organization dedicated to advancing literacy and English language arts education across our state, and an affiliate of the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE). On behalf of our Executive Board, I write to express our strong support for LD 324, An Act to Increase Reading Proficiency in Public Schools.

On behalf of our organization, I'm writing in support of **LD 324, An Act to Increase Reading Proficiency in Public Schools**. We are grateful to the Legislature for recognizing the urgent need to strengthen reading outcomes and for proposing meaningful investments to support this goal.

The bill's appropriation of \$5 million per year—along with targeted funding for summer reading programs—demonstrates a serious and much-needed commitment to helping students achieve grade-level proficiency in reading. The inclusion of grant opportunities for school administrative units provides flexibility for districts to implement strategies that best fit their local needs, while the summer programming component addresses learning loss and promotes continuity of growth outside the traditional school year. This bill begins to demonstrate an understanding that time, resources, and local flexibility are essential to lasting reading improvement.

To maximize the positive impact of LD 324, we respectfully offer the following suggestions:

- **Make reading and literacy the primary focus** of this bill, rather than combining efforts with math. Reading proficiency presents unique challenges and opportunities that merit dedicated attention and resources.
- **Establish a task force of Maine educators and administrators** to guide the design and implementation of the initiative. Local educators bring critical insight into what works in real classrooms and can help ensure that state funding is used effectively and responsibly.
- **Support a range of research-informed literacy strategies, balanced with professional judgment.** Reading instruction is not one-size-fits-all. Flexibility allows educators to adapt to student needs and draw on both evidence and experience.
- **Support ongoing, research-based professional development** in the teaching of reading. Strong reading instruction requires continued learning, particularly in culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate approaches.
- **Ensure that classrooms and summer programs are well resourced**, including robust classroom libraries and access to a variety of texts—print and digital—that reflect students' lives and interests, as well as share the perspectives of others.
- **Include continued support for students in grades 4–12.** While early literacy is crucial, older students also benefit from targeted interventions and skill development, especially as academic demands increase across content areas.
- **Ensure fair access to funding for districts of all sizes**, including those with limited staffing or grant-writing capacity. This helps ensure every community can benefit from the resources provided by the bill.
- **Encourage formative, classroom-based assessments** that inform instruction, rather than rely on standardized testing only. Teachers need timely, meaningful information to make effective decisions for student learning.
- **Maintain local control and transparency when collaborating with national foundations.** Partnerships can be beneficial, but Maine educators and leaders should remain at the center of decision-making.
- **Preserve educator autonomy** through accountability measures that are embedded, authentic, and aligned to curriculum—not external mandates that restrict instructional choice.

- **Respect educators as professionals** by allowing them to adapt reading instruction in response to their students' needs. Literacy growth is not linear, and instructional flexibility is key to student success.

We know that strong reading skills open the door to success in every academic subject and in life beyond school. LD 324 is an important step toward that goal, and we thank you for your leadership and vision in advancing it.

We strongly urge your committee to read the NCTE Position Statement: The Act of Reading: Instructional Foundations and Policy Guidelines, available online at <https://ncte.org/statement/the-act-of-reading/> and posted at the end of this letter, particularly the section titled Guidelines for Policymakers.

With deep respect and appreciation for your work,



Patti Forster
President, Maine Council for English Language Arts
maine.ela@gmail.com



National Council of
Teachers of English

The Act of Reading: Instructional Foundations and Policy Guidelines

OVERVIEW

Reading is a sociocultural activity in which readers construct meaning from text through the lenses of culture and personal experience (Barton, 2007; Gutierrez, 2008; Perry, 2012). Contrary to popular conceptions of the act of reading, readers do not merely “decode” or “unlock” meanings encoded by authors. Even a simple word like dog is interpreted through the lens of personal experience, which, in turn, is filtered through cultural representations of dogs and other animals. This does not mean, however, that readers can simply make up meanings without regard to the author’s intentions. Readers must construct responsible readings (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994) that take account of the text, the reader’s assessment of the author’s intentions, the reader’s background knowledge and experience, the sociocultural context, and the activity of which reading is always a part.

The act of reading is always embedded in an activity, some purposeful act that makes a particular set of demands on the reader. The role of text in religious rituals is illustrative. For the words to “count” as part of the ritual, they must be read (or sung, included in call & response, shouted) in the right way (standing, sitting, or kneeling) at the right time and the right place (a place of worship). The familiar, if ineffective, practice of round-robin reading works in much the same way. In this case, successful “reading” requires giving the

appearance of paying attention, not interrupting other readers, being able to pick up the text in the right place when called upon, as well as reading the text fluently when it is one's turn. In the same way, a literature discussion in a 10th-grade English class requires that students observe prescribed rules of participation as well as make relevant comments in order to successfully demonstrate that they have read and understood the text under discussion. From this perspective, readers don't learn to read once and for all as much as they learn to read particular texts, in particular ways, for particular purposes, and in particular contexts (Gee, 1990; Wallace, 2003). The purpose of reading instruction, then, is to expand the range of ways and purposes for which students read.

Notably, a sociocultural model of reading acknowledges the role of skills in reading and learning to read. Phonics, for example, plays an important role in reading, but readers generally use their knowledge of phonics in concert with both their knowledge of the regularities of language and their experience and general knowledge of the world to construct meaning from texts (Dudley-Marling & Paugh, 2004). However, from a sociocultural perspective, conflating reading and learning to read with phonics is at odds with both theory and research on what readers actually do in the process of making sense of texts. Equating reading with the mastery of an autonomous set of reading "skills" will always be insufficient to understanding the reading process. In summary, aspects such as the readers' purpose and background knowledge, the social and cultural setting, and the nature of the text all affect how readers interact with texts (Street, 1995, 2013; Smagorinsky, 2001). Effective reading instruction acknowledges the complexity of reading.

FOUNDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE READING INSTRUCTION

Effective reading instruction is underpinned by key principles that derive from a sociocultural model of literacy and related research, including, for example:

- Reading development is strongly correlated with the number of words children read (Allington, 2001/2011). Therefore, all readers must be immersed in a rich program of reading a wide range of accessible texts written for a range of purposes and audiences (i.e., genres) with frequent opportunities to read connected texts.
- Accessible texts utilize predictable linguistic structures and familiar content that enable readers to draw on their linguistic and cultural knowledge, experiences, and interests in the process of making sense of texts (Rhodes & Dudley-Marling, 1996).
- A program of effective reading (and writing) instruction is an ongoing journey throughout one's schooling and must include opportunities to engage with a wide range of genres, including digital and multimodal texts (Bråten & Braasch, 2017).
- All children require some measure of explicit, intensive, and individualized support and direction depending on their needs as readers. This includes explicit attention to the sound system of language where necessary. No child, however, requires unique instruction based on an educational label (Dudley-Marling & Paugh, 2004).
- Effective reading instruction is informed by factors such as ongoing assessment of students' reading development, their interests, attitudes toward reading, motivation, and home literacy experiences. This includes routine evaluation of students' response to instruction since one size never fits all (Scieurba, 2017).
- Reading instruction must focus primarily on meaning. An overemphasis on words, letters, and sounds misleads developing readers as to the purpose of literacy (Smith, 2006).
- Explicit teaching of reading skills is most effective when it is embedded in the context of meaningful reading (Pearson, 2004).

Ultimately, an effective literacy learning environment immerses children in a language "bath" that includes regular opportunities to learn and use various forms of oral and written language as a means of drawing on their background knowledge in support of classroom learning and to fulfill a wide range of purposes with a variety of audiences in different (sociocultural) settings. In the following section, we offer a representative sampling of instructional strategies that emerge from these principles.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHING READING

- Immerse students in a literate environment that includes environmental print and access to a wide range of genres and text types, including digital and multimodal texts (Allington, 2018).
- Read to students regularly and purposefully, including a range of genres and text types.
- Provide students with regular opportunities to read books (or other texts) of their own choosing for extended periods of time.
- Utilize multiple instructional formats (shared reading, guided reading, literature discussion circles, individualized instruction) and regularly reflect on these teaching practices and student progress in order to meet the strengths and needs of students (Bacon, 2017).
- Help students build background knowledge of topics and language that enables students to understand what they read.
- Provide opportunities for inquiry and language study, including vocabulary, word and text structures, and spelling patterns, that emerge from authentic reading experiences (Baumann, 2009).
- Model higher-order thinking skills, using techniques such as think-alouds, to illustrate the range of meaning-making strategies readers utilize in the process of reading, including strategies (e.g., prediction, self-monitoring, reflection) they use before, during, and after engagement with meaningful texts (Murphy et al., 2016).
- Support reading fluency through strategies like repeated and assisted reading as well as the use of books featuring familiar topics, stories, and language (DiSalle & Rasinski, 2017).
- Support students' reading comprehension by providing regular opportunities for students to respond to reading through discussion, writing, art, drama, storytelling, music, and other creative expressions (Cervetti, 2019; Wilkinson & Son, 2011).
- Expand students' opportunities for learning and support learning to read a range of genres and text types by integrating reading and writing across the curriculum (Graham & Harris, 2017).

GUIDELINES FOR POLICYMAKERS

- Respect educators as professionals, value their knowledge of the students and community they serve, and encourage them to develop and adjust lessons according to the instructional needs of their students (Allington, 2001/2011).
- Support educators with ongoing, research-based professional development on the teaching of reading, including practices that are considerate of students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and developmental levels (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017).
- Ensure that classrooms are well resourced, including classroom libraries that feature a range of genres and text types including digital and multimodal texts (Gaiman, 2015; Miller & Sharp, 2019).
- Implement mechanisms for evaluating school structures and practices to ensure that instructional environments are considerate of the range of cultural, linguistic, and personal experiences students bring with them to school (Castellón et al., 2015).
- Promote formative classroom-based assessments that gather information to highlight students' literacy abilities and assist educators in making decisions on their instruction and curricular choices to best meet students' needs (Afflerbach, 2016).
- Connect state and district standards with authentic assessment practices that serve to inform instruction with "usefully" reported results and to accurately showcase children's literacy abilities (Davis & Vehabovic, 2018).
- Establish authentic, embedded, curricular-aligned accountability practices that do not thwart educators' autonomy to best meet students' literacy instruction needs (Fountas & Pinnell, 2018).

Reading is a human activity—the glue, the bridge, the vehicle that connects students to themselves and other worlds, whether formatted digitally or in print (Goodman, Fries, & Strauss, 2016). Reading promotes knowledge acquisition and vicarious journeys, encouraging exploration of multiple experiences, plot lines, points of view, and interpretations that enhance the knowledge bases of readers, tying together meaning through their personal and cultural lenses. Furthermore, reading serves many purposes: looking inward and outward to establish identity and connect with self and others (Koopman, 2016).

RESEARCH CITED IN THIS STATEMENT

- Afflerbach, P. (2016). Reading assessment. *The Reading Teacher*, 69(4), 413–419.
- Allington, R. L. (2001/2011). *What really matters for struggling readers: Designing research-based programs* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Longman.
- Allington, R. L. (2018). Children's literature in the reading program: Engaging young readers in the 21st century. *The Reading Teacher*, 68(7), 491–501.
- Bacon, C. (2017) Multilanguage, multipurpose: A literature review, synthesis, and framework for critical literacies in English language teaching. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 49(3), 424–453.
- Barton, D. (2007). *Literacy: An introduction to the ecology of written language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, UK: Blackwell.
- Baumann, J. F. (2009). Vocabulary and reading comprehension: The nexus of meaning. In S. E. Israel & G. G. Duffy (Eds.), *Handbook of research on reading comprehension* (pp. 323–346). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bråten, I., & Braasch, J. L. G. (2017). Key issues in research on students' critical reading and learning in the 21st century information society. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 29, 1571–1598.
- Castellón, M., Cheuk, T., Greene, R., Mercado-Garcia, D., Santos, M., Skarin, R., & Zerkel, L. (2015). *Schools to learn from: How six high schools graduate English language learners college and career ready* (prepared for Carnegie Corporation of New York). Stanford, CA: Stanford Graduate School of Education.
- Cervetti, G. (2019). Five decades of comprehension research: Informing the future. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 51(1), 123–131.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/teacher-prof-dev> ^[1]
- Davis, D. S., & Vehabovic, N. (2018). The dangers of test preparation: What students learn (and don't learn) about reading comprehension from test-centric literacy instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 71(5), 579–588.
- DiSalle, K. & Rasinski, T. (2017). Impact of short-term intense fluency instruction on students' reading achievement: A classroom-based, teacher-initiated research study. *Journal of Teacher Action Research*, 3(2), 1–13.
- Dudley-Marling, C. & Paugh, P. (2004). *A classroom teacher's guide to struggling readers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (2018). Every child, every classroom, every day: From vision to action in literacy learning. *The Reading Teacher*, 72(1), 7–19.
- Gaiman, N. (2015). Why our future depends on libraries, reading and daydreaming. *Cape Librarian*, 59(3), 13–17.
- Gee, J. P. (1990). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses*. London, UK: Falmer Press.
- Goodman, K. S., Fries, P., & Strauss, S. (2016). *Reading—The grand illusion: How and why people make sense of print*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (2017). Reading and writing connections: How writing can build better readers (and vice versa). In C. Ng & B. Bartlett (Eds.), *Improving reading and reading engagement in the 21st century* (pp 333–350). Singapore: Springer.
- Gutiérrez, K. D. (2008). Developing a sociocritical literacy in the third space. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 43(2), 148–164.
- Koopman, E. M. (2016). Effects of “literariness” on emotions and on empathy and reflection after reading. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 10(1), 82–98.

- Miller, D., & Sharp, C. (2019). The power of the classroom library: Why every classroom needs this well-curated resource for students. *Literacy Today* (2411-7862), 37(1), 38–39.
- Murphy, P. K., Andiliou, A., Firetto, C. M., Bowersox, C. M., Baker, M., & Ramsay, C. M. (2016). Intratextual persuasive messages as catalysts for higher order thinking: An exploratory investigation. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 48(2), 134–163.
- Pearson, P. D. (2004). The reading wars. *Educational Policy*, 18(1), 216–252.
- Perry, K. (2012). What is literacy?—A critical overview of sociocultural perspectives. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 8(1), 50–71.
- Rhodes, L. K., & Dudley-Marling, C. (1996). *Readers and writers with a difference: A holistic approach to teaching struggling readers and writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978/1994). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP.
- Sciurba, K. (2017). Journeys toward textual relevance: Male readers of color and the significance of Malcolm X and Harry Potter. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 49(3), 371–392.
- Smagorinsky, P. (2001). If meaning is constructed, what is it made from?: Toward a cultural theory of reading. *Review of Educational Research*, 71(1), 133–169.
- Smith, F. (2006). *Reading without nonsense* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Street, B. V. (1995). *Social literacies: Critical approaches to literacy in development, ethnography and education*. New York, NY: Longman.
- Street, B. V. (2013). Literacy in theory and practice: Challenges and debates over 50 years. *Theory into Practice*, 52(sup1), 52–62.
- Wallace C. (2003) *Reading as a social process*. *Critical Reading in Language Education*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wilkinson, I. A. G., & Son, E. H. (2011). A dialogic turn in research on learning and teaching to comprehend. In M. L. Kamil, P. D. Pearson, E. B. Moje, & P. Afflerbach (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. IV, pp. 359–387). New York, NY: Routledge.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH SUPPORTING THIS STATEMENT

- Allyn, P., & Morrell, E. (2016). *Every child a super reader: 7 strengths to open a world of possible*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Anderson, R. S., Grant, M. M., & Speck, B. W. (2008). *Technology to teach literacy: A resource for K-8 teachers*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Baron, N. S. (2017). Reading in a digital age. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 99(2), 15-20.
- Bloome, D., Castanheira, M. L., Leung, C., & Rowsell, J. (Eds.) (2019). *Re-theorizing literacy practices*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bloome, D. (1985). Reading as a social process. *Language Arts*, 62(2), 134–143.
- Cain, K., Compton, D. L., & Parrila, R. K. (2017). *Studies in written language and literacy: Book Theories of reading development*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.
- Carrier, L. M., Rosen, L. D., Cheever, N. A., & Lim, A. F. (2015). Causes, effects, and practicalities of everyday multitasking. *Developmental Review*, 35(3), 64–78.
- Cole, M. W., David, S. S., & Jiménez, R. T. (2016). Collaborative translation: Negotiating student investment in culturally responsive pedagogy. *Language Arts*, 93(6), 430–443.
- Compton-Lilly, C. (Ed.) (2009). *Breaking the silence: Recognizing the social and cultural resources students bring to the classroom*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Cooper, N., Lockyer, L., & Brown, I. (2013). Developing multiliteracies in a technology-mediated environment. *Educational Media International*, 50(2), 93–107.
- de la Luz Reyes, M. (2012). Spontaneous biliteracy: Examining Latino students' untapped potential. *Theory into Practice*, 51(4), 248–255.
- Dobler, E. (2015). E-Textbooks. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 58(6), 482–491.

- Farstrup, A. E., & Samuels, S. J. (2011). *What research has to say about reading instruction* (4th ed.). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Freire, P. (1987). The importance of the act of reading. In P. Freire & D. Macedo (Eds.), *Literacy: Reading the word and the world* (pp. 21–26). South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey.
- Ghiso, M. P. (2013). Playing with/through non-fiction texts: Young children authoring their relationships with history. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 13(2), 26–51.
- Goodman, Y. M., Martens, P., & Flurkey, A.D. (2014). *The essential RMA—A window into readers' thinking*. Katonah, NY: Richard C. Owen.
- Gort, M., & Reyes, I. (2016). Biliteracy in schools and communities. *Language Arts*, 93(5), 339–340.
- Hall, N. (1987). *The emergence of literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Harste, J. C. (1984). *Language stories & literacy lessons*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Iddings, A. C. D. (2009). Bridging home and school literacy practices: Empowering families of recent immigrant children. *Theory into Practice*, 48(4), 304–311.
- Jones, S. (2013). Critical literacies in the making: Social class and identities in the early reading classroom. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 13(2), 197–224.
- King, M. (1980). Learning how to mean in written language. *Theory into Practice*, 19(3), 163–177.
- Larson, L. C. (2015). E-Books and audiobooks. *The Reading Teacher*, 69(2), 169–177. doi:10.1002/trtr.1371
- Leu, J. D., Kinzer, C., Coiro, J., Castek, J., & Henry, L. (2013). New literacies: A dual-level theory of the changing nature of literacy, instruction, and assessment. In D. E. Alvermann, N. J. Unrau, & R. B. Ruddell (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (6th ed., pp. 1150–1181). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Leu, J. D., Kinzer, C. K., Coiro, J., & Cammack, D. W. (2004). Toward a theory of new literacies emerging from the internet and other information and communication technologies. In J. Unrau & R. B. Ruddell (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (5th ed., pp. 1570–1613). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Luke, A. (2012). Critical literacy: Foundational notes. *Theory into Practice*, 51(1), 4–11.
- Lysaker, J. T., & Miller, A. (2013). Engaging social imagination: The developmental work of wordless book reading. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy* 13(2), 147–174.
- McBride, C. (2015). *Children's literacy development: A cross-cultural perspective on learning to read and write*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Moyer, J. E. (2011). What does it really mean to “read” a text? *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 55(3), 253–256. doi:10.1002/jaal.00031
- Pacheco, M., & Gutiérrez, K. (2009). Cultural-historical approaches to literacy teaching and learning. In C. Compton-Lilly (Ed.), *Breaking the silence: Recognizing the social and cultural resources students bring to the classroom* (pp. 60–77). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Palmer, D. K., & Martínez, R. A. (2016). Developing biliteracy: What do teachers really need to know about language? *Language Arts*, 93(5), 379–385.
- Peterson, S. S. (2013). Literacy teacher education to support children's multi-modal and print-based literacies. *Literacy Teacher Educators*, 93–105.
- Prensky, M. (2012). *From digital natives to digital wisdom: Hopeful essays for 21st century learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Rowan, L., Knobel, M., Bigum, C., & Lankshear, C. (2002). Mindsets matter: An overview of major literacy worldviews. In *Boys, literacies, and schooling: The dangerous territories of gender-based literacy reform* (pp. 77–98). Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Unrau, N. J., Alvermann, D. E., & Sailors, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (7th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Vasquez, V. M. (2004). *Negotiating critical literacies with young children*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum.
- Wagner, R. K., Schatschneider, C., & Phythian-Sence, C. (Eds.). (2009). *Beyond decoding: The behavioral and biological foundations of reading comprehension*. New York, NY: Guilford.

Weaver, C. (2009). Reading process. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

STATEMENT AUTHORS

This document was revised by a working committee comprising the following:

- Laurie Katz, Chair – The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH
- Curt Dudley-Marling – Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA (retired)
- Ashlee Meredith – New Kent High School, New Kent, VA, and Rappahannock Community College, Glenss, VA
- Diane Miller – University of Houston-Downtown, Houston, TX
- Joseph Pizzo – Black River Middle School, Chester, NJ, and Centenary University, Hackettstown, NJ

This statement is a revision of On Reading, Learning to Read, and Effective Reading Instruction: An Overview of What We Know and How We Know It by the Commission on Reading of the National Council of Teachers of English (2004).

This position statement may be printed, copied, and disseminated without permission from NCTE.

Article printed from National Council of Teachers of English: <https://ncte.org>

URL to article: <https://ncte.org/statement/the-act-of-reading/>

URLs in this post:

[1] <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/teacher-prof-dev:>

<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/teacher-prof-dev>