

**Public Comments**  
**Margaret McLaughlin**  
**February 20, 2020**

Thank you, School Board, Superintendent Hutchings and ACPS Staff for the opportunity to speak tonight. I see great potential in making lasting and important change in literacy achievements across ACPS, especially the crucial years of K-2. My goal tonight is to encourage you to continue building your own knowledge and understanding of how people learn to read in order to make decisions that optimize instruction, student learning, teachers use of time, and ultimately graduation rates and the future success of ACPS graduates.

We can all agree that learning to read well is of critical importance. I first became aware of some of the challenges of making that happen through the excellent reporting of Emily Hanford and her work for APMReports.

(<https://www.apmreports.org/story/2018/09/10/hard-words-why-american-kids-arent-being-taught-to-read> ) If you have not read or listened to those audio documentaries, I highly encourage you to do so. I have also found information presented by The Reading League to be extremely helpful when trying to comprehend the complex brain processes we are inviting our learners to under take. (<https://www.thereadingleague.org/knowledge-base/>)

As I understand it, there is basically one way a brain goes from a non-reading brain to a reading brain. Researchers such as Stanislas Dehaene and others have demonstrated this through fMRI studies. There are many different methods teachers and schools can engage in to make this happen. One piece of that should be explicit and systematic phonics instruction. Others include: Phoneme awareness, Sound-Symbol (or phoneme-grapheme) correspondences, Patterns and conventions of print (or orthography), Morphology, Syntax, and Semantics. Our children will benefit when teachers and administrators have the knowledge of this content in order to choose and deliver methods of instruction that rewire brains to read efficiently and effectively. I have grave misgivings that the recently adopted Teachers College Units of Study does not systematically and efficiently address all of these crucial areas in early literacy especially after the recent report by Student Achievement Partners

([https://achievethecore.org/content/upload/Comparing%20Reading%20Research%20to%20Program%20Design\\_An%20Examination%20of%20Teachers%20College%20Units%20of%20Study%20FINAL.pdf](https://achievethecore.org/content/upload/Comparing%20Reading%20Research%20to%20Program%20Design_An%20Examination%20of%20Teachers%20College%20Units%20of%20Study%20FINAL.pdf)) The knowledge is out there. Let's get it into the hands of teachers so they can leverage it daily to optimize their time and instruction for the benefit of all ACPS students.

I also encourage you to push back against the idea that students and teachers need to focus solely on "skills" in early literacy. Content knowledge is so important.

(<https://cdn.coverstand.com/13959/644729/f035fee3722e70841e135f650d679ce8e6857aba.pdf>) But just as we need to systematically build neural pathways in their brains that lead to smooth orthographic mapping, we also need to build neural pathways that lead to strong anchor points for material seen in middle school and high school. I love that we buck the national trend of 19 minutes of science and 16 minutes of social studies instruction a week. We can leverage our literacy blocks to ground skills in rich, sequential content that make kids go, “wow! I didn’t know that before!” The use of Core Knowledge Language Arts curriculum at Lyles Crouch, one of the highest scoring schools in the district, seems like an interesting place to start.

The recent formation of the K-2 Literacy Task Force is also of great interest to me. I look forward to the potential for continued engagement on this important topic across the many stakeholders including parents and advocates.

Thank you.