

# Public Comments for School Board Meetings

#426

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Early Childhood Literacy / Superintendent's comments

Full Name \*

Will Olson

What is your relationship to ACPS? \*

Community Member

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I am writing to highlight the incomplete discussion about appropriate reading instruction contained in Superintendent Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings's column titled "The important of early childhood literacy" published in the April 14, 2022 issue of the Alexandria Times. Specifically, Dr. Hutchings's column omits any reference to the need for schools to provide explicit systematic evidence-based phonics instruction to children to give them necessary skills to decode words.

Dr. Hutchings wrote that the American Academy of Pediatrics "has found that children who are exposed to language and books at a young age tend to read earlier and excel in school compared with those who are not." Dr. Hutchings is correct that exposing young children to language and books is valuable because it provides them with knowledge essential for reading comprehension.

As reflected in the American Public Radio Reports series on reading (<https://features.apmreports.org/reading/>), scientific research, however, has established that exposure of children to books and language alone is insufficient to teach children to read. Rather, schools need to teach students how the sounds in words are represented by different groups of letters through explicit systematic phonics instruction.

Beginning this school year, ACPS has adopted a new reading instructional program at the K-2 level, Really Great Reading, that, if implemented with fidelity, will provide necessary systematic phonics instruction. In his column, Dr. Hutchings did not reference the general need for explicit systematic evidence-based phonics instruction or ACPS's implementation

of Really Great Reading at the K–2 level. Through this omission, Dr. Hutchings missed an opportunity to inform parents about the importance of explicit systematic phonics instruction. Dr. Hutchings also failed to encourage parents to learn more about the Really Great Reading curriculum in order to support their children’s efforts to use their developing decoding skills at home when reading with their parents.

To provide better support to Alexandria families, I would hope Dr. Hutchings in the future will highlight the importance of explicit systematic evidence-based phonics instruction and offer resources to parents to help students practice the decoding skills that they are learning in school.

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