



Talking Points to Improve Third Grade Reading in Virginia

- Today, **43% of Virginia's third graders** cannot read proficiently(Reading SOL, 2024-25).
- **Virginia is behind** Alabama, Louisiana, Indiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee when it comes to helping children read by the third grade.
- **Only 31% of Virginia's fourth graders** are proficient in reading(NAEP).
- When a student cannot read, they will struggle in K-12, higher education, the workforce and life.
- Research tells us that the reading brain is built as early as **18 months of age**. Books in the home are linked to student achievement and improved literacy skills.

Virginia Literacy Act (VLA)

- The Virginia Literacy Act(VLA) is one of the most comprehensive policies in the nation from preschool through eighth grade. Other states have only seen improved reading outcomes when the investment is long term. The policy is working and schools are in the **second year of implementation**.
- Our schools are using evidence-based curricula, teacher and division capacity is being built to teach reading effectively, reading plans are developed for students with reading difficulties, reading specialists and coaches are being deployed.
- The evidence-based professional development and coaching help teachers implement explicit literacy instruction in the classroom and provide targeted interventions. The system is built. **Now, we must ensure strong implementation.**
- **Budget Amendment 117#12h(Herring) and 117#4s(Pekarsky)** will increase current funding with an additional \$2.3M in FY 27/28. This increase will provide professional development, coaching and technical assistance that is embedded in classroom practice to produce lasting gains in reading outcomes.

The Virginia Language and Literacy Screener System(VALLSS)

- Early literacy screeners from preschool to third grade help teachers understand the skills children have in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and listening comprehension. It is a tool that helps detect reading difficulties early, provides data to drive instruction in the classroom and informs families with strategies.
- The fourth through eighth grade screener is implemented with students who fail the ELA SOL. This is a tool for teachers to understand how to help struggling readers.
- **Budget Amendment 117#12h(Herring) and 117#4s(Pekarsky)** will provide \$0.9M for FY27/28 to implement the screener in preschool through eighth grade three times per year.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library(DPIL)

- Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Virginia (DPIL) is a public-private partnership(50-50 match of state and private funds).
- DPIL is a book gifting program that mails quality books to children birth to age five, regardless of their zip code, to inspire a love of books and reading. A child and family enrolled at birth have a library of 60 books.
- The Imagination library is backed by science and research. Other states with a **statewide program** have seen a **29% increase in literacy and kindergarten readiness skills and improvement in third grade reading**.
- Currently, the program **reaches 79,000+ children and families**. Just last year, over **909,000 books** were delivered to children.
- **Over 300,000 of Virginia's early learners do not have equitable access.**
- **Budget Amendment(FY 27/28) 122#25h(Askew) and 124#32s(Van Valkenburg)** will provide \$5.0M to expand DPIL to reach more children and families, eliminate book access gaps and maintain the cost of \$1.30 per book. Without increased funding, tens of thousands of children will go without access to books. Data will be tracked to show program impact.