

4/8/26

Good afternoon, MCPS Board Members. I'm Antoinette Tatum, and I'm grateful for the chance to present to you today.

I'm asking you to include dedicated FY27 funding to expand targeted reading programs in high-need schools. **This proposal** pairs a County–MCPS match and a public **donation match so every community dollar becomes \$3.**

Let me tell you about Jace and his mom, Jana. Jace started second grade curious—he loves science and asks big questions—but reading never clicked. Jana reads with him every night, yet the words slip away. He guesses, hesitates, and each wrong try makes him quieter.

By October he's in a small reading group; by November he's still guessing. The reading specialist sees him twice a week for twenty minutes—time squeezed between testing, coaching, and coverage. Those short interventions aren't targeted or consistent. Jace's confidence plummets.

Jace isn't an exception. He's the pattern.

Maryland READS shows 45% of our third graders aren't reading proficiently. Only **47% of Black** and **32% of Hispanic third graders** meet proficiency. Early-literacy data shows **60%+ of Hispanic and 40% of Black K–2 students** below grade level.

We know the stakes: low literacy erodes communication, critical thinking, teamwork, and self-management—skills adults need to work, support families, and participate in community life.

This joint match model leverages public dollars, builds community ownership, and scales proven tutoring and Reading Centers where they're needed most. Fund programs that deliver **consistent, individualized instruction**, expand adult capacity in classrooms, and give kids the chance to catch up before gaps become lifetime barriers. **The proposal includes reporting to the Board and measurable student outcomes so progress can be tracked.**

I'm skeptical by nature, but I believe our county can choose what's best for every child. Prove that belief right. Give Jace—and every child in Montgomery County—the chance to read with confidence and joy.

Thank you.