



## **Proposed Priority and Definitions Secretary's Supplemental Priority and Definitions on Meaningful Learning Opportunities**

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide a comment on the "Proposed Priority and Definitions-Secretary's Supplemental Priority and Definitions on Meaningful Learning Opportunities." My name is Dr. Delphia Smith, an Assistant Professor of Reading/Literacy Education in the School of Education at Howard University. As a scholar, my research centers literacy, underestimated (Black and Brown) children, and inequities they face, often marked by unequal treatment, access, and outcomes. I have also had the opportunity to write about research based evidence on the state of reading as it relates to America's students along with practical ways on how to improve literacy/reading outcomes.

Underperformance in reading in U.S. Public Schools continues to be an issue, dating back 40 years. Recent reading data released from the National Center for Education Statistics revealed that 31% and 30% of the nation's fourth and eighth graders respectively, scored at or above reading proficiency level, [a critical benchmarks of progress], with a two-point decrease for each grade level when compared to 2022. The data illustrates that **less than one third of America's 4th and 8th graders are reading proficiently**, representing a continual downward trend. The proposed priority, which is to support meaningful learning opportunities for students through the provision or expansion of access to high-quality instructional materials, is one way to help improve reading outcomes for America's children. However, to ensure America's K-12 students are afforded meaningful learning opportunities, implementation must account for the systemic inequities that shape literacy outcomes.