

Assistant State Superintendent Katharine Oliver Reads 30 Minutes for 30 Days...and then some

March 20, 2014

Listening to others read has been a steady beat in Assistant State Superintendent Katharine Oliver's professional rhythm for many years. Ms. Oliver commutes and listens from her Hagerstown home to her Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Baltimore office.

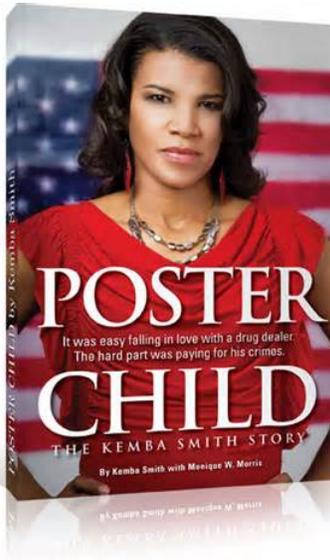
"As a fan, and regular reader, of audio books I've come to appreciate how much we can enjoy listening to others read—regardless of our age," said Ms. Oliver.

When Ms. Oliver was asked, along with her assistant state superintendent colleagues to participate in Governor Martin O'Malley's annual *Read Across Maryland Month* initiative. Juvenile Services Education (JSE) students were "the students, regardless of age, with whom I want to read," Ms. Oliver said.



"I want to support our teachers as they work to instill a life-long love of reading in our students," Ms. Oliver said of her interest in participating in *Read Across Maryland Month*.

In February, author and activist Kemba Smith visited the Waxter Center to present at a kickoff assembly for “What’s L-O-V-E Got To Do With It?,” a subcomponent of the Pen (itentiary) or Pencil (POP) national mentoring initiative and aligned with *Poster Child*, Ms. Smith’s memoir of her relationship with drug dealer and the “...physical, mental and emotional abuse disguised as ‘love.’” The L-O-V-E module was introduced to the Waxter instructional curriculum in March.



Ms. Oliver chose to read “So I Ain’t No Good Girl,” and “A Letter to my Daughter”—two short stories from Sharon G. Flake’s *Who Am I Without Him? Short Stories About Girls and the Boys in Their Lives* to align with Ms. Smith’s message to girls about “red flags” in relationships and the “...need to know you deserve better.”

Ms. Oliver didn’t have to read alone. “I was delighted when the girls agreed that they, too, would like to read aloud *with me*,” she said. “We took turns reading passages from the selected stories.”

“Each just stepped up,” Ms. Oliver said. “It was as though we had rehearsed.”

“When we finished a bit early the students were eager to select another story for us to read together,” said Ms. Oliver.

Ms. Oliver recalled her mother’s years-ago suggestion that “I would have to kiss a few frogs before I kissed a prince.”

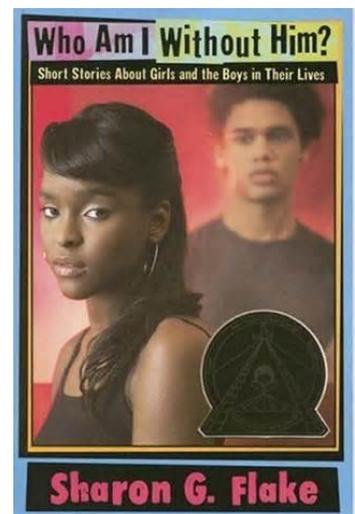
“Yes,” one student said. “You have to respect yourself before you can love anybody.”

Ms. Oliver asked the students why they thought the girl in Flake’s “So I Ain’t No Good Girl,” had no name. One student said that the girl in this story “needed her boyfriend more than she needed herself.”

“I know our girls enjoy reading yet I was still a bit surprised to observe how enthusiastically they embraced our shared reading experience,” Ms. Oliver said. “And they were so polite—not only to the adults in the room, but to their fellow students as well.”

“I hope the girls left with an appreciation for not only enjoying the reading experience that occurs by oneself but also the deepening of the reading experience that comes from discussing what we have read with others,” Ms. Oliver said.

“As we implement new literacy standards in our schools, it’s important that students learn to think critically about what they have read and return to the text to answer questions,” said Ms. Oliver. “I’m hoping that during the short time we had together, the students saw how that can happen.”





Ms. Oliver presented each student participant her own copy of *Who Am I Without Him?* and donated library copies as well.

Read Across America, the parent to *Read Across Maryland Month*, is an annual, Seussical celebration of Theodore Geisel’s contributions to children’s literature and to reading. Geisel, of course, is “Dr. Seuss.”

President Obama recognized Read Across America Day, 2014 with Proclamation by stating that

Literacy is the foundation of every child’s education. It opens doorways to opportunity, transports us across time and space, and binds family and friends closer together. When parents, educators, librarians, and mentors read with children, they give a gift that will nourish souls for a lifetime. Today, Americans young and old will take time to get lost in a story and do their part to cultivate the next generation of talent and intellect.

“It was a delight to be able to spend two hours with our students engaged in such a fun learning activity,” said Ms. Oliver. “I left with a renewed energy to provide our JSE students with the best educational experiences we can offer and a commitment to creating ‘radical readers’ in our schools.”

“We need to foster an environment where students delight in getting lost in the pages of a book regardless of their surroundings—the sign of a true radical reader,” Ms. Oliver said.

“This opportunity to read with the Waxter students underscored the critical role of JSE’s Media Centers in helping to establish strong readers and lifelong learners,” said Ms. Oliver. “We need to continue to reinforce their integral role within the JSE instructional program.”

“I didn’t know who I was, once upon a time,” one student said. “I have found myself, I surely have.”