Dear Oregon legislators:

I am an educator, a parent of a child with dyslexia, & an advocate with Decoding Dyslexia Oregon.

Oregon is finally waking up to the literacy emergency that our children are living in. Recent test scores have shown that despite the brilliance and potential that exists within every child, **as many as 60% of Oregon's third graders are not fully proficient in reading**.

A root cause of our crisis is that Oregon has largely failed to incorporate over five decades of research on how to teach reading. **Reading doesn't come naturally. Most students need clear, systematic instruction, which includes deliberate practice in decoding words, and explicit instruction in components of language comprehension.**

Thankfully, we are now on the cusp of change, due to Gov Tina Kotek's call for significant investments in literacy that embrace this approach, collectively known as the "science of reading." Rep. Jason Kropf, D-Bend, has introduced two bills, House Bill 3198 and House Bill 3454, with enormous potential for moving toward a statewide comprehensive literacy strategy.

While we laud the bills' goal, **we are concerned that the proposed legislation includes the same lack of centralized accountability that has led to our current crisis.** As written, the bills employ a district grant model, leaving it up to individual districts to choose to apply for literacy funding and to decide, within parameters, how to spend it. **This leaves far too much to chance for our kids who are reading below grade level.** They need the state to demand that districts take action with strategies grounded in scientific evidence.

A recent Oregon Secretary of State risk report found that the Oregon Department of Education is not doing enough to ensure taxpayers' investments in education are achieving their goals and resulting in better outcomes for historically underserved students. **In order to have systemic change, we need to change the system itself.**

Oregon can look to other states that have done this and significantly closed achievement gaps. **In Mississippi, Black and Latinx students have improved reading proficiency at the same rates as white students in far wealthier states. In Florida, Latinx 4th graders are reading three grade levels above their Oregon peers.** These and other successful states employ two key best practices.First, the state takes direct responsibility for students and their right to literacy, rather than abdicating responsibility to individual districts. And second, the state uses meaningful metrics to measure progress and target resources where they're needed most.

**To achieve the shared vision of improving literacy across Oregon, we call for amendments to House Bill 3198 and House Bill 3454 that:**

**Center students who struggle the most with reading:** Instead of a grant application process for districts, funds and resources should be specifically and explicitly dedicated to schools with the highest numbers of struggling readers, administered and directed by the Oregon Department of Education.

**Ensure the instruction and tools that children need to succeed are grounded in evidence-based research about reading:** For example,a governor-appointed task force could vet specific assessments, curricula, teacher training, and other resources.

**Ensure our 197 school districts have what they need to support teachers and all students in an equitable way:** Intensive, high-dosage tutoring helps struggling readers immediately, while teacher training is a long-term investment in our educators that pays dividends for generations. Both should be prioritized for funding by policymakers and coordinated by the state education department to ensure accountability.

On behalf of every Oregon child who struggles with reading, we deeply appreciate policymakers' commitment to literacy. We are grateful for their openness to learn from us and others to help all students fulfill their potential. **Literacy is liberation - and reading is for everybody.**


Respectfully submitted by,

Heather Millehrer-Huerta
parent, educator, Springfield resident