

Dear Representatives, Senators, and Governor Kotek,

My name is Sharon Bellusci and I am a parent of two children who have attend Oregon public schools. I am a constituent from Bend, Oregon.

I am a literacy advocate. I have also personally experienced the heartbreak of having a child who was a struggling reader. Now my child is a skilled and voracious reader, but only because we were able to provide them with years of tutoring outside of school. I support the proposed outcomes of these bills – improved literacy and teacher training. However, I can not support this bill without significant change so that funds will be used strategically and effectively.

I have spent the past 5 years learning why the school and teachers did not know the research on why kids struggle to read and what can be done to prevent reading failure. The most challenging part of my advocacy is convincing people that **the system is not working for the majority of children**. This, despite the overwhelming evidence: 60% of Oregon 3rd graders are not reading at grade level.

If Oregonians really believe in equity, then we all need to acknowledge that this failure rate is too high, that the education system plays a significant role in how children are taught to read and therefore those in charge of the education system needs to make change, not the status quo, a priority.

We can learn from the missteps of other states. From the Colorado Sun: “In 2019, Colorado spent \$231 million to help young children catch up on reading. But rates of kids with significant deficiencies only worsened.” Why? The short answer is that the only significant positive results were made by schools with accountability measures and who advanced teacher knowledge and understanding of how to teach ALL kids to read.

HB3198 and HB3454 could be good first steps toward addressing our crisis, but should be amended in order to ensure our students get what they need. I’m asking the Governor and the education committee consider the following changes:

- **Center students who struggle the most with reading.** Instead of a voluntary 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.
- **Require a Governor-appointed task force** that vets specific assessments, curricula, teacher training, and other resources. This will ensure literacy strategies are grounded in the five decades of research collectively known as the science of reading and provide consistency across districts.
- **Prioritize tutoring and teacher training.** Intensive, high-dosage tutoring helps struggling readers immediately, while teacher training is a long-term investment

in our educators as professionals that pays dividends for generations. Both should be prioritized in funding, vetted by the above task force and coordinated by the Oregon Department of Education.

When the potential of children is stilted by illiteracy, and children are led to believe that they are not smart simply because they haven't been taught to read, we will lose the talent needed by this upcoming generation to help solve the issues of their time. Please amend these bill so that they are effective and strategic, and have the oversight required for accountability and success.

Thank you for listening,

Sharon Bellusci