

My name is Molly Smith and I am Principal at North Powder Charter School.

I'm writing because over 60% of Oregon 3rd graders aren't reading at grade level - even though research shows that 95% of kids can learn to read, given clear, structured instruction. I'm concerned that as currently written, HB3198 and HB3454 leave it up to individual districts to choose whether to apply for literacy funding that addresses our reading crisis. What happens to kids who live in districts that choose not to apply? Or in small districts where administrators are already stretched to the max and may not have the time, resources, or knowledge to understand that their teachers are not using best practices.

While we know this is an issue, my belief is that this should be fully funded and automatic. My school district is a very small one. We work hard at applying for grants and extra funding, however that time applying for such things also takes away from the other responsibilities of my job, or more often, my weekends and evenings.

I am especially concerned that:

- The bills prioritize district choice over student needs. In 2022, our Secretary of State's office warned that the Oregon Department of Education's failure to intervene to help students and safeguard taxpayer investments is a larger problem than infringement on local control.
- Oregon is ignoring best practices from other states where the states have taken direct responsibility for literacy and have seen impressive, sustained gains in reading. 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 you to 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.
- Ensure the instruction and tools that children need to succeed are grounded in scientifically based research about reading. An example of guard rails could be a Governor-appointed task force that vets specific assessments, curricula, teacher training, and other resources.
- 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.

Every teacher in my elementary school has taken, or is currently taking Dr. Ronda Fritz's reading clinic. I'm thankful that my staff are working partly on their own time, to better serve the children of our school. Thankfully, Dr. Fritz is a local, and we have this opportunity to improve the knowledge and skills of our teachers for the benefit of our students. What we are learning in her reading clinic is hands-down the best reading professional development I have ever received, and I've been an educator for 28 years. Please support these changes. Our students deserve it.

Sincerely,

Molly Smith
Principal - North Powder School District