

Submitter: Paulette Selman  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Education  
Measure: HB3198

My name is Paulette Selman and I am a parent, school psychologist, and education advocate in Portland.

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. This leaves out children in districts that choose not to apply, and is a continuation of inequitable practice.

Literacy is a civil right.

In my experience working in schools for 15 years, and now working with families who are advocating for services for their children with disabilities, I have personal experience with children who did not receive evidence-based reading instruction. There is a developmental period, a critical window of time, in which young children are ready to learn to read and make huge gains when exposed to instruction. Most children learn to read when given adequate instruction that is based on how our brains learn to decode and comprehend text. When we use other methods during this critical period, and teach children outmoded strategies like using pictures to guess words instead of decoding them, we miss a huge opportunity to set up a lifetime of learning.

With regard to the current bills HB3198 and HB3454, 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. We need all school districts across the state to adopt science-based instruction. What is more important, the right of local adults to influence how we teach reading, or the right of children to be taught to read at all?

- 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. Mississippi is a good example of a state that began requiring evidence-based teaching and saw huge gains across demographic groups. We can do this. 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.

I know you have the best interest of our young learners at heart. Thank you for making these bills work for all children.

Sincerely,

Paulette Selman

School Psychologist and Parent Advocate