

March 31, 2023

To: House Committee on Education
From: Our Children Oregon, The Children's Agenda
RE: HB 3198

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Hudson and Wright, and Members of the Committee,

LITERACY IS A BASIC CIVIL RIGHT. We live in a complex information age that requires literacy for success. The ability to read and read well is the difference between being able to participate fully in society or living at the margins. Today, fewer than 40 percent of Oregon's third graders can read at grade level¹. For students in under-resourced schools, students of color, students with disabilities, and bilingual students, the numbers are worse. Starting in early childhood, reading is a crucial entry point for future learning and is essential for full participation in civic life.

For generations, children of color and children with disabilities, primarily Black, Brown, and Indigenous, have been the subjects and objects of educational research and innovations that operate with the core guiding principle that they are a problem to be fixed. The kids are not the problem. The problem is the fundamental inequities and lack of accountability baked into our educational system. It's time for Oregon's educational system to rise to the moment. Our kids and our teachers deserve better.

WE CAN SUCCESSFULLY TEACH OREGON'S KIDS TO READ. Teaching kids to read can't be left to chance. Research shows **95 percent of children can learn to read**, given clear, systematic, structured instruction. With tools grounded in the proven, evidence-based practices in the science of reading, we can improve literacy outcomes for Oregon's children.

The science of reading combined with these two best practices can help Oregon close the significant literacy opportunity gaps that put kids from marginalized communities at a literacy disadvantage:

1. The state takes direct responsibility for students and their right to literacy, rather than abdicating responsibility to individual districts.
2. 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](#) that-

¹ [Oregon Statewide Report Card 2021-2022, page 43](#)

- **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.

LET'S MAKE OREGON A LITERACY LEADER. Background, zip code, life circumstances or the language a child speaks at home shouldn't determine if they are taught to read. Dual language abilities are strengths, not deficits. To change literacy outcomes for Oregon's kids, whoever they are and wherever they live, the system needs to change.

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

ORGANIZATIONS

Our Children Oregon

Oregon Kids Read

Decoding Dyslexia Oregon

Reimagine Oregon

Reading Results

Friends of the Children

International Dyslexia Association - Oregon Branch

Y.O.U.TH PDX

FACT Oregon

Salem-Keizer NAACP-1166 Branch

Sadie Reads, Barron Gilbert Foundation

Urban League of Portland

NAYA Action Fund

YMCA of Columbia Willamette Community Vision

LITERACY ADVOCATES

Jennifer Schuberth, Ph.D

Ronda Fritz, Ph.D, Associate Professor of Education, Eastern Oregon University

Shaheen Munir-McHill, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Practice (Special Education),
Portland State University

Dean John Watzke, University of Portland

Dr. Anna Moriah Myers, University of Portland

Dr. Andy Saultz, Professor of Education Policy

Anne Adler, Non-profit Leader

Lisa Moreira, Teacher Collaborator - Literacy

Barbara Steinberg, PDX Reading Specialist

Rita Moore, Ph.D, Former Director, School Board, Portland Public Schools

Christine M.T. Pitts, Ph.D, Senior Policy Fellow, Center on Reinventing Public Education

Sara Kerr, Vice President of Education Policy Implementation, Results for America

Julie Esparza Brown, Ed.D, Professor in Special Education, Portland State University,

Former School Board Co-Chair, Portland Public Schools, Vice-President of the Division

for Diverse Exceptional Learners, Council for Exceptional Children