

Submitter: Hazel Wheeler  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Education  
Measure: HB3198

I love to read. When I was young, I read aloud to my younger sister so much that she claims I taught her how to read. As a parent, I've been so thrilled to see our son enjoy reading as well. That said, in my time as a parent volunteer in his school, I saw so many--many--children struggling to read, some at a very basic level. In the library, I tried to help children pick books that were engaging and slightly challenging, and this was often far below their grade level. When I supervised the school's 'Reading Buddies' program which paired second-and-third grade struggling readers with seventh graders, I saw what many teachers do-- these kids were often off task and distracting the other youngsters in their group. This was their way of saving face in front of their peers and those so-impressive older kids. I believe that HB3198 is necessary to help ensure that Oregon students have better learning experiences when it comes to reading. At current, not even four out of ten third graders are reading at their grade level. Families are often left to fend for themselves when it comes to identifying and addressing any learning disabilities like dyslexia and dysgraphia. About 16% of our families in the state are living at or below the poverty line and would be unable to financially access resources like tutoring; further, insurance companies are often difficult to navigate when it comes to getting our kids diagnosed or finding therapeutic treatment for learning disabilities. I have firsthand experience of this as a parent of a student who has been diagnosed; as a stay-at-home parent, I have the time and fortunately, connections which have made it less difficult, but it's still challenging. I recognize our family's privilege in that statement, and know that so many other parents have neither the time or resources to follow up on what the schools are failing to provide. SB3198 would help in earlier identifying students with some of these challenges, providing earlier interventions with summer reading support to lessen learning loss. Further, I want to add the importance of relevance to our students. They need materials that reflect themselves, their communities, and their experiences. When I homeschooled my son for a year and a half, I crafted a more student-led curriculum. It's no surprise that the materials he chose were far more engaging than what he'd had in his brick and mortar classroom. Lack of interest makes reading an undesirable chore for students and they are less likely to retain the material we want them to learn from. I believe that this will also foster some level of empathy and compassion, when students can all see themselves and their peers represented in positive ways. Reading is likely the most critical life skill we teach in schools. I support HB3198 because it will be an improvement in the lives of not just students, but their families, and the family's long term futures. Please pass this measure. Sincerely, Hazel Wheeler (former preschool teacher)